

Work Package 5 – the national arena for combating poverty**National report: Poland**

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Abbreviations

Minimum Income Protection (MIP): For the purpose of this report framework, MIP refers to cash benefits/transfers that can essentially be characterised as **benefits of last resort**, with the aim to alleviate poverty or social exclusion. Eligibility to MIP is determined by **means- testing**. MIP typically includes Social Assistance schemes or similar provision with a broad scope (i.e. for all legal residents of a country), but can also include more targeted provision for specific subgroups of the working age population (e.g. for single parents or unemployed people). However, schemes targeting only incapacitated working age persons are NOT within the scope of this study. Within the context of this study, the focus should be on MIP in relation to working-age recipients. MIP can also include the provision of means-tested benefits for working age people who are IN WORK, including tax credits or other types of benefit paid as a top up for low wages.

Single Parents (SP): Single parents are those who live alone with their dependent children. Dependent children are considered to be aged less than 16.

Long Term Unemployed (LTU): Persons unemployed for longer than 12 months

Working Poor (WP): Workers whose equivalised household income is less than 60% of the national median income

Active Inclusion (AI): For the purpose of this report framework, AI refers to a policy that seeks to promote the economic and social integration of poor people through Minimum Income Protection that maintains incentives to work and gives beneficiaries access to training and job support and enabling social support.

Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Issues (TC): The social dialogue body operating at the central level, responsible – among other things – for negotiating minimum wage, labour market policy, and social policy.

Polish New (PLN): Polish currency after denomination in 1995 (new Polish zloty).

Public Employment Services (PES): A term referring to the public employment offices: local and regional (LAU I and NUTS II).

(Quasi) Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI): introduced in a form of temporary allowance from social assistance in 2004. Guaranteed if a person fulfils income criterion and an additional criterion from the list defined by the law. Before in a selective form.

State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) – state agency responsible for controlling work safety and working conditions (*Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy – PIP*).

Foreword

Reducing poverty and social exclusion is one of the main challenges for ensuring social cohesion in Europe. The research project COPE – Combating Poverty in Europe: Re-organising Active Inclusion through Participatory and Integrated Modes of Multilevel Governance’ – analyses trends in poverty and social exclusion in Europe, and examines the dynamics of minimum income protection policies that potentially help alleviate the risk of poverty in Europe. A particular focus is on the situation of single parents, long-term unemployed and the working poor, who face particular risks of poverty and social exclusion. To what extent have minimum income policies functioned as last resort social security for these three groups, and in what sense can ‘active inclusion’ policies credited with protecting them from poverty and social exclusion?

Co-financed by the European Commission in the 7th Framework Programme, the COPE project unites researchers and stakeholders from six European countries, the UK, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and Norway. Having started in February 2012, COPE runs over a three-year period. COPE’s method is comparative – analysing developments in five European countries (Poland, Germany, UK, Sweden and Italy). Its focus is inherently multi-level, looking in turn at developments at European, national and local level.

The present report is part of COPE’s effort to uncover the dynamics of national level policy reforms in the area ‘active inclusion’, namely reforms affecting national policies that specify the adequacy of minimum income benefits, the provision of employment services, as well as the organisation of access to social services. It focuses particularly on the three groups; single parents, long-term unemployed persons, as well as the working poor.

The present report is complemented by national case studies covering developments in the other four countries. It feeds into a comparative report on similarities and differences in the development of minimum income protection across Europe, to be published later in 2013.

Introduction

The socialist paradigm of combating poverty in Poland was based on the concept of full employment. It was characterised by the low diversity of wages, the broad programme of social security and the small scope of actual social assistance. The system in such shape collapsed after 1989 due to the mass unemployment and the limited ability of state-owned companies to fund social infrastructure (which had occurred already in the 1980s). The new system of combating poverty developed under the influence of market forces and new stakeholders (private employers and liberal and conservative political parties) – however the impact of socialist heritage on its construction remained visible.

Before 1989 the problem of poverty concerned primarily two groups: poor pensioners and large families. Poverty was also concentrated on the rural areas rather than urban (Beskid 1999). Under the new economy poverty began to be connected mainly to long-term unemployment. Over time the phenomenon of working poor started to emerge, but it began to be increasingly noticed by Polish scientist only in the 2000s (Kozek et.al. 2005; Duszczyk 2010).

The first measures against poverty were undertaken already in 1990. A generous unemployment benefit system was applied at the beginning, which was expanded to all unemployed. Then the right to receive these benefits has been gradually restricted. Above that, in 1990s part of the labour force was shifted from economic activity to inactivity by large program of early retirement and invalidity pensions to unburden the system of unemployment benefits (Inglot 2008).

A more radical fight against poverty was implemented in the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the context of the accession to the European Union. It consisted of two components: increasing spending on ALMP and the establishing the right to social benefits (temporary allowances) for specific groups on the basis of thresholds and additional qualifying criteria. The European Social Fund has been used to finance ALMP, in order to create new jobs and trainings.

The fight against poverty in Poland has a specific nature: on the one hand, it is open to solutions developed at the level of the European Union (or in other members states), on the other hand it holds the belief that some traditional Polish solutions should still be used (for example: financial assistance set on securing biological needs rather than social, in-kind benefits, the strong participation of trade unions and Catholic Church as stakeholders, important role of the family in providing support).

The analysis is based on a broad document analysis and 18 semi-structured expert interviews: three interviews with Members of Parliament, three interviews with representatives of the social partners, seven interviews with a representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs¹, one with the representative of other ministry, three interviews with NGO's representatives, one with manager of a local social assistance office.

¹ The overrepresentation of ministry officials is connected to the highly fragmented structure of social policy management.

The study shows that the system of combating poverty in Poland is fragmented and non-transparent. The fight against poverty is still being "constructed": new ideas are tried, and future changes discussed. In addition, the fight against poverty has neither been a strategic political objective for at least a decade nor a theme for a serious public debate.

In the existing system, the unemployed can easily fall into poverty due to austerity of benefit policy. Long-term unemployed are denied the right to unemployment benefits and are, thus, often shifted into the social assistance system. Working poor have a limited access to the active labour market policy and to social assistance. Single parents, especially taking care of many children, are hardly benefiting from ALMP and face problems connected to the low level of financial support and underdeveloped childcare system.

1. The changing demand for minimum income since 1990

1.1. Structural drivers of increasing demand for minimum income protection

1.1.1. The protective capacity of unemployment insurance

Poland belongs to the countries which allocate relatively small part of GDP to labour market policy. In 2008, the largest resources for this purpose (more than 3% of national income) were allocated in Belgium. Among the countries, which allocated 2.5% - 1.5% of the GDP were: Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, France, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Austria, and Portugal. Poland – together with Sweden and Italy – was placed among countries disbursing 1% - 1.5% of national income to labour market policy (Hurley 2010:4). Meanwhile, there is a serious need for extended labour market public policy due to the high level of unemployment (Table No. 1) and the lasting problem of long term unemployment (Table No. 2). Although unemployment rates declined after the accession to the UE, they still remained relatively high.

Table No. 1: Unemployment in Poland in years 1995, 2000 - 2012 (IV quarter)

Unemployment rate	1995	2000	2005	2009	2010	2011	2012
ILO rate	13.1	16.0	16.7	8.5	8.9	8.8	9.3
Registered in local PES	14.9	15.1	17.6	12.1	12.4	12.5	13.4

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 1996, Table 3(189), and 2(206), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland.2006, Table 18 (180), and Table 15 (177), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland. 2010, Table 18(165), 15 (162), data for ILO unemployment rate and registered unemployment rate 2010- 2012: http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/wskazniki_makroekon_PLK_HTML.htm

Unemployment benefits are financed from the Labour Fund, which is based on employers' contributions (about 2.4% of the wage fund) and state subsidies. Employees do not pay contributions for unemployment insurance from their salaries. In the years 2005-2011 the Fund had a surplus and the government did not have to subsidize it². In 2012 situation changed and it became a necessity.

Table No. 2: Long-term unemployment rate by gender

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
ILO long term unemployment total rate	7.4	9.2	10.9	11.0	10.3	10.3	7.8	4.9	2.4	2.5	3	3.6
Of which:												
In men population	6.0	7.8	9.8	10.4	9.6	9.3	7.1	4.6	2.0	2.2	2.9	3.3
In women population	9.1	10.8	12.3	11.8	11.1	11.4	8.6	5.4	2.8	2.9	3.1	4.0

Source: http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/wskazniki_makroekon_ENG_HTML.htm

² <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/praca/fundusz-pracy/zestawienie-przychodow-i-wydatkowfp-za-lata-2005-2011-i-plan-2012/>

Questions were raised in the interviews about the system of financing unemployment benefits. For years trade unions have been opting for the introduction of individual unemployment insurance, which – in their opinion – would protect better from the negative effects of unemployment than the current system offering restricted access to relatively low benefits (Interview 01, 012). Yet, this idea has not been accepted by any government – although it was rooted in the Polish tradition of labour insurance (Ingłot 2008). Whereas, employers emphasize that the contributions to the Labour Fund should be lower and that the money is not managed effectively (Interview 011). The government has indeed blocked the spending from the Labour Fund in the past two years, under the banner of the need to rationalize expenditure and cut public deficit (Interview 01, 012).

Table No. 3: Labour Fund expenses (2005- 2011)

Specification	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Dynamics of Labour Fund expense (year 2005=100%)	100%	99%	100%	104%	187%	203%	223%
Share of unemployment benefits in Labour Fund expenses	54%	51%	41%	33%	43%	45%	39%

Source: Own calculations: <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/praca/fundusz-pracy/zestawienie-przychodow-i-wydatkowfp-za-lata-2005-2011-i-plan-2012/>

Unemployment benefits are granted for 6 months if the unemployment rate in a given local administrative unit (*powiat*, LAU 2) does not exceed 150% of the average unemployment rate in the country; for 12 months, if the unemployment rate exceeds 150% of the average unemployment rate in the country. Unemployment benefits are granted for 12 months also if an unemployed person is over 50 years of age and has at least 20 years of documented work record or has a dependent child aged up to 15 years, and his or her spouse is also unemployed and has no right to benefits. Eligibility is also dependent on the documented work record: at least 365 days of employment in the last 18 months, provided that the wage was at least equal to minimum wage and social insurance contributions were covered by an employer.

In Poland, unemployed collect benefits for a relatively short period - especially in comparison to countries such as Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway. It should be considered an important background when analysing public policies aimed at combating relatively high unemployment in Poland (Kozek 2013). There is also a visible need for changes in benefit policy in order to take into account the flexible employment patterns in contemporary economy.

Benefits are taken by the small part of the unemployed population. This is due to large share of the unemployed who have insufficient work record to be granted a benefit (graduates, people on atypical contracts) and the long-term unemployed (who lost the entitlement to benefits). In 1990 80% of registered unemployed received benefits while in the critical year

of 2003³ between 13% and 14% (Szytko-Skoczny 2004:22), and in the end of year 2012 again only 13%⁴. According to the interviews, trade unions perceive the decline of accessibility (see Table No. 4) as a serious social issue, which should be modified (012,01).

Box 1: Unemployment benefits

Entitlement to benefits depends on:

Work record: documented 365 days of work, with all social insurance contributions covered and at least minimum wage.

Duration: 6 months if unemployment in a given administrative unit (*powiat*) does not exceed 150% of the average unemployment rate in the country; 12 month if it exceeds 150% of the average unemployment rate in the country;

Amount: Since 2010 the amount is higher for the first 3 months (PLN 717) and lower in the following months (PLN 563)⁵. However, those who have worked for less than 5 years are entitled only to 80% of the amount and those who have worked for over 20 years to 120% of the amount.

Source: The Act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 2004 with amendments.

Table No. 4: Gross unemployment benefits and registered unemployed persons (years 1995, 2000, 2005, 2009)

Year	Number of registered unemployed (mln)	Amount of unemployment benefits (mln)
1995	2,628	1,34
2000	2,702	0,53
2005	2,773	0,37
2009	1,892	0,33

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2001 page 181, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2006, Table 17(179), and Table 11(209), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2010: Table 17(164) and Table 12 (195).

Also wage replacement rate of the unemployment benefit is currently assessed as low in contrast to the mid-1990s. Replacement rate is calculated as the ratio of the average benefit and the average salary. In 2009, it dropped to 18.3% (see: Table No. 5).

Generally speaking, the financial support for the unemployed is modest. Long-term unemployed are in the most difficult position. They often become social assistance clients, or are "pushed" into the shadow economy. According to estimates done by NGOs, up to 40% of the unemployed work without any type of contract (Interview 016). Those people balance on the edge of poverty, but seem not to collect social assistance benefits for the whole year to

³ Unemployment rate in Poland reached 20% in that year.

⁴ Data taken from : http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/wskazniki_makroekon_PLK_HTML.htm

⁵ Previously the amount was constant. The new solution was introduced to provide incentive to find work.

avoid being caught by social workers on earning in shadow economy (Interviews 04, 03, 015).

Table No. 5: Average unemployment benefit as % of average pay:

Year	Replacement rate
1995	32.4
1999	21.8
2000	21.9
2005	21.5
2009	18.3

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 1997, Table 3(232), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2010, Table 12 (195)

A major obstacle against transition from passive to active labour market policies has been the practice of combining the registration as unemployed with work. Many of the unemployed – also in the assessment public opinion – abuse the right to benefits by taking up short-term or occasional employment in shadow economy. (Kozek 2013). Unemployment benefits are low and insufficient for the survival of families, which motivates people to undertake such actions (Interviews 01,012). Those people do not have free time to participate in ALMP measures and use all available possibilities to avoid it (Interview 04).

However, it should be noted, that the present system of financing unemployment benefits, which is not insurance based, should work in favour of activation (Clegg 2005 in: Bonoli 2010). The benefits are in the hands of the state and are highly conditional: everyone who refuses to take part in ALMP or to start employment may be crossed out from the unemployment register and lose benefits.

Box 2: Sanctions for refusing to take up employment or training

- First refusal: losing the status of registered unemployed for 120 days.
- Second refusal: losing the status of registered unemployed for 180 days.
- Next consecutive refusal: losing the status of registered unemployed for 270 days.

Source: the Act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 2004 with amendments.

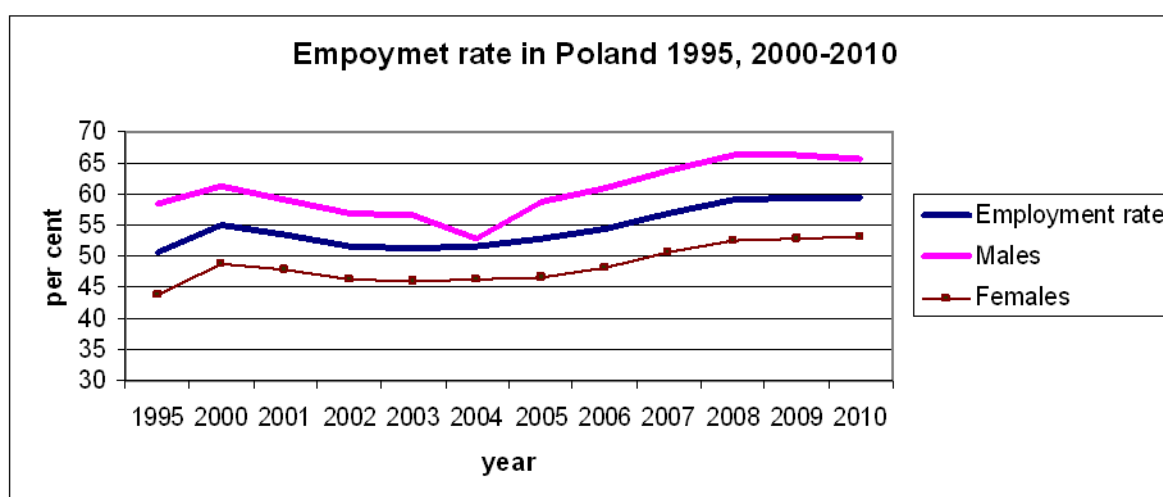
Another instrument of conditionality is the health insurance. Although access to free-of-charge health care is a constitutional right in Poland, people who are out of work have to either cover the insurance by themselves (which is extremely difficult for people without income) or register as unemployed in order to have it covered by the state⁶. This makes losing the status of unemployed quite costly, since it result in losing health insurance coverage.

⁶ In some cases it is cover by social assistance.

1.1.2. The protective capacity of employment

Since the beginning of the transition period Poland has changed from the country with a socialist workfare to the country that has lost jobs in the global competition. Pre-accession crisis was associated with the increase of unemployment, post-accession period with decrease in it. In years 2000 – 2009, the employment rate varied from slightly above 50% to approximately 60% and had an increasing tendency. The last two years of slowdown in economic growth resulted in a slowdown in employment (Figure No. 1). In 2011, the total employment rate equalled 59.7%: 66.3% for males and 53.1% females. It is generally believed that the level of employment is too low, and that measures should be taken to increase it. Trade unions call for implementing industrial policy aimed at protecting jobs, whereas employers for reducing costs of work.

Figure No. 1: Employment in Poland in 1995 (November), 2000 -2010 (IV quarter)



Source: Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 1998, Table 1(146), http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/wskazniki_makroekon_ENG_HTML.htm

Our study shows there is a very strong belief among the interviewed that work protects against poverty, and even more so against social exclusion (Interviews No. 01,02,04,07, 011,012, 013, 014). The analysis of the at-risk of poverty indicators seems to confirm at least the first conviction. In 2010, the unemployed people were at 5 times higher risk of poverty than the working. Atypical forms of work provide less protection than standard ones, even if it is self-employment. Permanent contract protects against poverty much better than a temporary contract and work on full-time basis better than part-time work (Table No. 6).

Atypical forms of employment persist and develop (Figure No. 2, Figure No. 3). Employers express the opinion that atypical employment will increasingly be used in the future because of the changing modes of work (into more flexible) and the need to downsize costs of employment (Interview 011).

Basically, there are no legal forms of employment, which would not be tight to some extent to social insurance (there is one exception). However, only employment under a contract of employment (temporary and permanent, full-time and part-time) provides the full social insurance coverage. Self-employed have a free choice: they can insure themselves against the

total amount of income but may also underwrite insurance at a minimum level, which they often do. Civil contracts allow paying less social insurance or even any. There are no serious statistics on this forms of employment. However, non-standard employment has been used extensively to increase the flexibility of the work system. Unfortunately, these forms produce less protection connected to social insurance.

Table No. 6: In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by economic activity

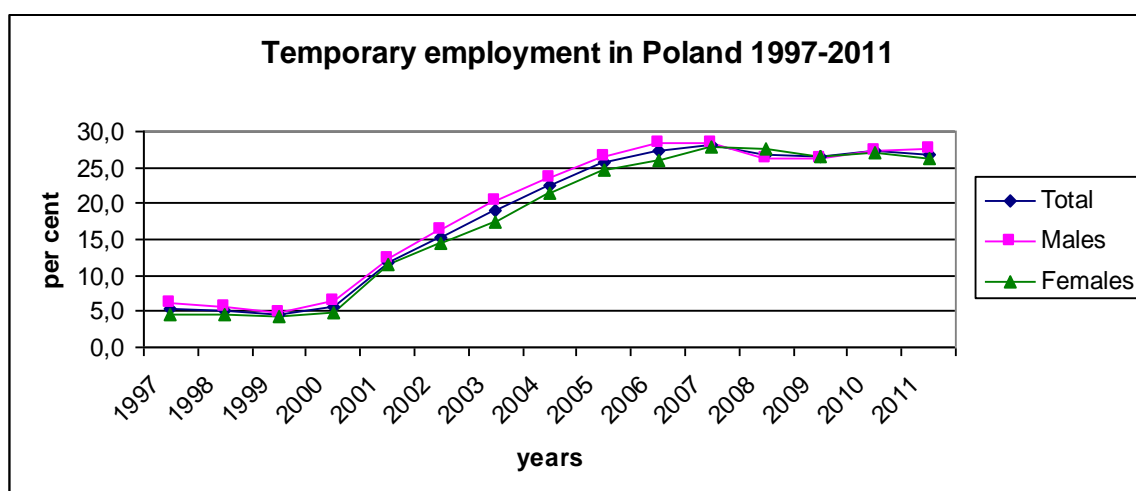
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Employed persons	13.9	12.8	11.7	11.5	11.1	11.5
Employees	:	:	:	:	6.8	7.4
Employed persons except employees (mostly different civil contract arrangement)	:	:	:	:	27.7	26.3
Unemployed persons/ from 18 to 64 years	74.1	70.1	63.6	59.3	58.3	60.1
Of which						
Males	78.5	77.8	71.1	66.4	65.4	63.9
Females	70.1	64.0	58.2	54.0	52.7	56.5
Permanent contract	6.6	5.7	5.5	5.5	5.3	6.0
Males	7.8	6.5	6.4	6.6	6.5	7.2
Females	5.3	4.7	4.4	4.2	3.9	4.6
Temporary contract	12.5	12.9	11.2	11.9	12.5	12.9
Males	14.3	15.7	13.9	13.4	12.7	11.5
Females	12.9	10.2	10.6	12.2	9.6	12.3
Full time	12.6	11.4	10.7	10.5	10.0	10.5
Part-time	23.0	22.7	19.5	19.9	19.9	20.6

Source: Eurostat 2012/ SILC.

Furthermore, temporary employment has highly increased in the last decade, resulting in the lower work protection. Temporary contract may be terminated with a two-week notice period, or expires with the period for which it was concluded. A very large share of temporary contracts in total employment has many negative consequences: widespread fear of job loss, lower wage pressure and higher workers conformism.

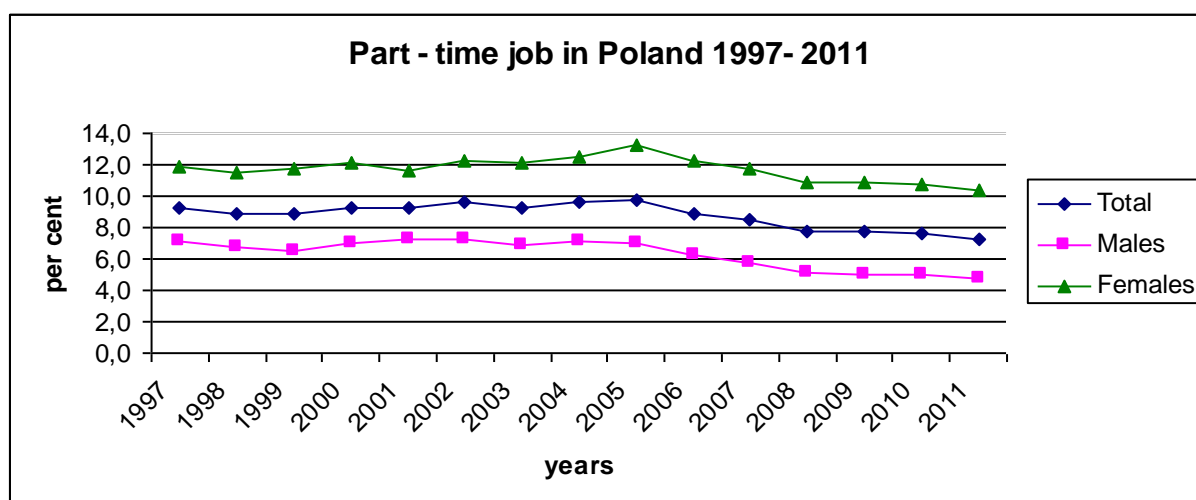
In contrast to the above, part-time employment has not been extensively used from the beginning of transformation and more women than men have been working part-time. Polish employers do not consider part-time employment as a flexible form of employment. Involuntary part time employment has increased since 2001 up to 25%, similarly for men and women.

Figure No. 2: Temporary employment in Poland, 1997-2011



Source: LFS Eurostat 2012

Figure No. 3: Part-time job in Poland, 1997-2011



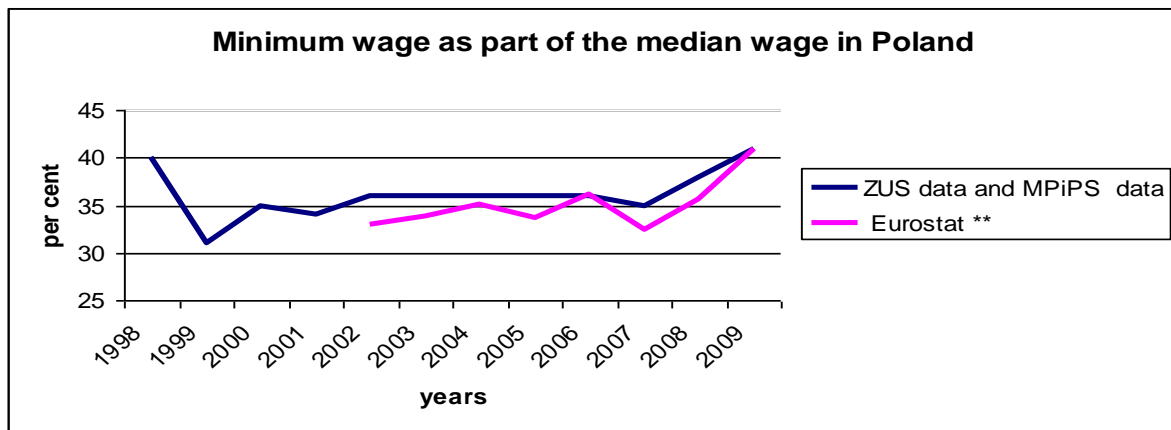
Source: LFS Eurostat 2012

The protective power of standard employment is based on the minimum wage mechanism. The level of the minimum wage has been set in Poland from 1956. Until 1990 the government has indicated the amount of the minimum wage. From 1990 to 2003 the Minister of Labour and Social Policy has performed this task. Since 2003, the minimum monthly wage could be determined through negotiations in the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Issues. If social partners are not able to agree on the minimum wage in Tripartite Commission (TC) till July 15, the government takes the decision. In this case minimum wage cannot be less than the sum proposed by the government as a basis for negotiations in TC. The minimum wage amount proposed by the government should take into account the increase in prices of goods and services (inflation rate). The minimum wage as a percentage of the average wage in the years 1998 - 2009 ranged from 31% to 40%.

The minimum wage has been the subject of numerous debates, particularly in Tripartite Commission. Employers are against using minimum wage as a tool for satisfying social needs

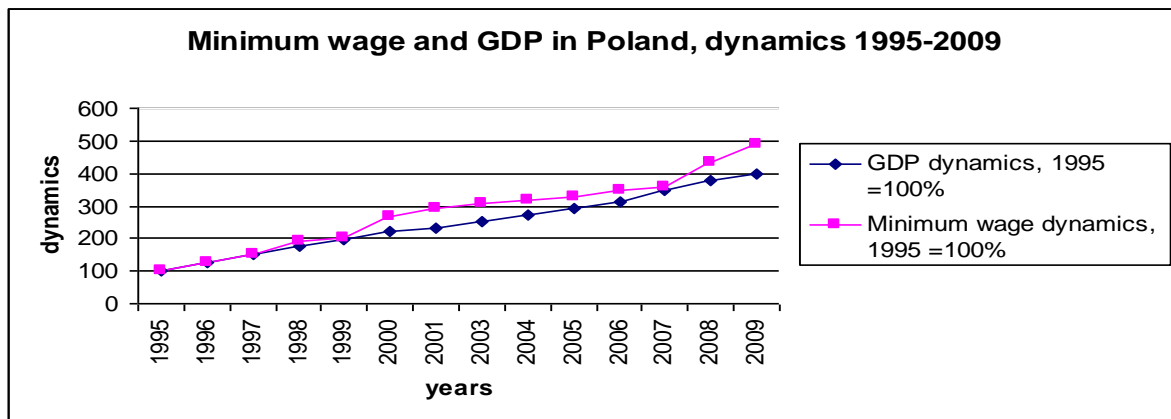
and combating social problems (Interview 011). They request its regional differentiation (Interview No. 011). Whereas trade unions aim for the increase of minimum wage to 50 % of average wage, referring to the ILO standard. They also point out that in the domain of minimum wage governmental practices are based on very superficial treatment of social dialogue and taking up one-side decisions without any negotiations.

Figure No. 4: Minimum wages as a part of the median wage in Poland



Source: official data of ZUS (Social Insurance Institution) and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, *Eurostat 2012.

Figure No. 5: Minimum wage and GDP in Poland.



Source: official data of ZUS (Social Insurance Institution).

Other estimates (for example Eurostat) reported that nearly 1.5 million people (14 % of the employed) earn less than one thousand PLN net per month. This huge difference stems from the fact that the working week not always consists of 40 hours – many people work less. Sometimes – as signalled by the National Labour Inspectorate – employers underestimate the actual hours worked. There is no minimum wage per worked hour in Poland, although there is a statutory minimum monthly wage. Above that, the statutory minimum applies only to work contract arrangements. Minimum wage has increased in the recent years in relation to the average wage (Figure No. 5) and followed the GDP dynamics although somewhat more rapidly (Figure No. 5).

Table No. 7: The share of employees with salaries below the statutory minimum and below 67% of average wage among all employees

Specification	Total			Public sector			Private sector		
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
Per cent of the employees paid below minimum wage (to 1317 PLN)	5.0	5.2	4.9	0.1	0.1	0.2	8.4	7.3	9.9
Per cent of the employees paid below 67% medium wage	35.2	32.3	38.4	20.8	16.4	23.4	45.1	38.8	54.3

Source: Structure of wages and salaries by occupations in October 2010, Statistical Information and Elaborations, Warsaw 2012, CSO, Labour Division (GUS, Department of Labour, online: http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/pw_struktura_wynagr_wg_zawodow_10_2010.pdf Page 62. Caution: These figures do not include employees in companies with less than 9 employees, and those who have not worked in companies throughout the month.

Lack of affordable housing for the working poor begins to appear as a serious social problem. NGOs report that the group of workers who cannot afford to maintain a flat and become tenants of shelters for the homeless is increasing (Interview 013). Municipalities do not provide housing with a modest rent, and the government does not have such a program. The government generally supports those people who can afford the commercial mortgage. Whereas local governments are required to provide cheap housing for the needy but they have limited resources and many other priorities.

Avoidance and delay in payment of wages on the side of employers is a visible problem. Complaints against irregularities in the payment for work and other financial benefits arising from the employment relationship dominated among the complaints to the State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) (37% of complaints) (Report 2010). SLI controls realised in 2010 showed that 50% of the violations were a result of lack of financial means and 31% of disregard for the law (ibid). It seems that at the moment non-payment of wages is associated with delays in due payments between companies rather than the ill-will of employers (Interview No. 012).

The problem of working poor is not strongly present in the political debate. It is, however, a part of the public debate related to the so called “junk jobs” (mostly civil contracts without social insurance, bogus self-employment and job organised by temporary work agencies) (Interview No. 015). This is a problem concerning especially the young generation. It is estimated that 60% of young people are employed on civil contracts (Boni 2011). Above that, the phenomenon of underemployment is also connected to in-work poverty: people, who do not have full-time employment or work on hours have higher in-work poverty rates. Employers believe that the working poor are the cost (by-product) of economic development, i.e. diversity of incomes is a sign that the county is developing (Interview No. 011).

1.1.3. The protective capacity of the family

Fertility rate in Poland dropped from 2.0 in 1990 to 1.25 in 2000 (the lowest in the last 50 years) and reached 1.4 in 2010 (GUS 2012). This has lately started to be perceived as a serious social problem, especially in the context of future pension crisis.

The group of single parents (SP) consists mostly of single mothers. Fathers have constituted slightly more than 11% of SP population over the years (National Census 1988 and 2002). Single mothers have been a more frequent social phenomenon (13.2% and 16.8% of families for 1988 and 2002 respectively). The data showing increase of this type of families should be approached with caution. Single parents can be stimulated by government policy: they can take additional tax benefit – which encourages people not to get married (records in the tax law since the second half of the 90). In general, in the years 1988 – 2002 the increase of single parent families was significant, in particular those with several dependant children.

Single mothers usually take care of one child (63% - 65% of families), rather than two (26% - 28%) or three (6.5%) and very rarely for four or more children (2.4% - 2.6%). They also more often live in two-generation and three-generation families. National Census 2002 showed an increase in the number of children raised in single parent families in relation to the Census of 1988 (look at Table No 8: below).

The standing of single parents families has improved from 2005 to 2009: they were at a lower risk of poverty than large families with two parents (See Table No. 9). According to data from 2009, the poverty in SP families is at the same level as in all family types. Several hypotheses may be formulated. The family benefits for child in SP family is over twice as high as for child in numerous family. Also, the SP families often rely on informal care and support resources provided by two or three-generation families.

Table No. 8: Families with dependent children up to age the of 24

	Dynamics 2002/1988 in per cent	National 1988	Census 2002
		in thousands	in thousands
Total number families in Poland	97.9	6209.9	6079.4
Lone mothers with children	124.1	821.5	1019.3
by number of children			
1 child	127.7	517.9	661.5
2 children	114.8	230.4	264.5
3 children	123.8	53.7	66.5
4 and more children	136.2	19.6	26.7
Dependent children up to age 2	123.1	1227.7	1511.0

Source: Kobiety w Polsce 2007: 142

Table no. 10 provides information about the scale of unemployment divided by gender, age, education and work seniority. Regarding the protective capacity of family, several figures are

important. One third of women in age 25-34 are unemployed, which probably influences their reproductive plans. It is also quite possible that they were unemployed after maternity leave.

Women and men in the pre-pension age are the largest groups experiencing long-term unemployment. Women at that age often work as nannies in the shadow economy or take care of their grandchildren as a form of unpaid work, which enables their children (especially women) to seek for paid work.

Table No. 9: Poverty in families in 2005 and 2009

Poverty rates. %					
	In all type families in 2009	In families with two parents and 4 (and more) dependent children in 2009	In single mothers' families with dependent children in 2005	In single-parent families with dependent children in 2005	In single-parent families with dependent children in 2009
Subsistence minimum	5.7	21.3	14.7	14.5	6.4
Relative poverty line	17.3	49.2	20.9	20.5	16.0
Legal poverty line	8.3	35.8	21.3	20.7	8.9

Source: Kobiety w Polsce 2007: 208, for Year 2009 Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland GUS 2010, Table No. 9(204)

Note: The subsistence minimum determined by the Institute of Labour and Social Studies takes into account only basic needs and the consumption level below this minimum leads to emaciation. Poverty lines are estimated quarterly; in the fourth quarter of 2005 the extreme poverty line adopted at the subsistence minimum was 387 PLN for 1-person households and 1045 PLN for 4-person households (2 adults+2 children under 14). Relative poverty line is 50% of the mean monthly expenditure of households estimated with the use of the original OECD equivalence scale. According to this scale weight 1 is attributed to the first adult person in the household, weight 0,7 — to every next adult and weight 0,5 — to every child (i.e. person under 14 years of age). And thus, for instance, the relative poverty line for a 4-person household consisting of two adult persons and two children is 2.7 times as high as that for a 1-person household. The so called legal poverty line is defined as a monthly income of a household qualifying the household to apply for a social benefit in cash in accordance with the legislation in force. The legal poverty line throughout 2005 for a single-person household was 461 PLN, while for multi-person household — 316 PLN per person. The poverty lines are estimated quarterly; in the fourth quarter of 2005 the relative poverty line was 479 PLN for 1-person households and 1292 PLN for 4-person households (2 adults+2 children under 14).

Research concerning social groups at risk of poverty conducted in 2011 shows that among families it is still numerous ones who are at the highest threat. In 2011, among families with at least four children – about 29.5% lived in the conditions of statutory poverty and about 24% - in extreme poverty. In comparison single-parent families were in relatively better situation, with the indicator of risk of statutory poverty and extreme poverty at the level of was 7% (GUS 2011b).

EU-SILC (GUS 2012) research in 2011 shows that 34% households “make ends meet with difficulties or great difficulties”, whereas 30.1% “quite easily, easily, very easily”. Only 24.4% households can afford savings.

Table No. 10: Unemployment and long-term unemployment in 2008

Unemployed by months of unemployment (in the end of year 2008)		All unemployed = 100 %	Unemployed more than 12 months = 100%	Unemployed more than 24 months %
Specification				
Total		100.0	100.0	34.0
By age	18-24 years	20.7	9.9	16.2
	25-34 years	28.4	26.2	31.3
	35-44 years	18.6	20.7	37.8
	45-54 years	23.6	29.9	43.1
	55-59 years	7.4	11.0	50.5
	60-64 years	1.3	2.4	60.7
By education	Higher education	8.5	5.8	23.5
	Vocational secondary	22.3	21.3	32.4
	General secondary	10.2	7.7	25.7
	Basic occupational	28.6	30.2	35.9
	Lower secondary and less	30.4	35.0	39.2
By work seniority	Less than 1 year	15.2	15.0	33.6
	1-5 years	20.5	17.5	29.0
	5-10	13.2	13.2	34.1
	10-20	15.6	17.8	38.9
	20-30	10.8	12.0	37.7
	30 and more years	2.5	1.7	23.5
	No work seniority	22.3	22.9	34.9
Female Total		100.0	100.0	38.5
Female by age	18-24 years	21.6	11.4	20.3
	25-34 years	31.3	31.0	38.1
	35-44 years	19.8	22.4	43.4
	45-54 years	22.8	28.0	47.3
	55-59 years	4.4	7.2	63.2
Female by education	Higher education	10.0	6.3	24.1
	Vocational secondary	25.5	24.4	36.9
	General secondary	12.9	9.7	28.8
	Basic occupational	24.9	27.9	43.2
	Lower secondary and less	26.8	31.8	45.8
Female by seniority in work	Less than 1 year	16.3	15.7	37.0
	1-5 years	20.1	18.1	34.7
	5-10	13.2	13.6	39.7
	10-20	15.5	17.5	43.6
	20-30	8.4	8.7	40.1
	30 and more years	1.3	0.6	16.9
	No work seniority	25.3	25.8	39.3

Unemployed by months of unemployment (in the end of year 2008)		All unemployed = 100 %	Unemployed more than 12 months = 100%	Unemployed more than 24 months %
Male Total		100.0	100.0	28.2
Male by age	18-24 years	19.4	7.1	10.3
	25-34 1 years	24.6	17.5	20.1
	35-44 1 years	16.9	17.7	29.4
	45-54 years	24.7	33.5	38.2
	55-59 years	11.3	17.7	44.1
	60-64 years	3.1	6.6	60.7
Male by education	Higher education	6.5	5.1	22.1
	Vocational secondary	18.2	15.7	24.3
	General secondary	6.6	4.1	17.6
	Basic occupational	33.5	34.3	28.8
	Lower secondary and less	35.2	40.8	32.6
Male by work seniority	Less than 1 year	13.7	13.7	28.2
	1-5 years	21.1	16.4	21.9
	5-10	13.2	12.5	26.7
	10-20	15.7	18.3	32.7
	20-30	13.9	17.7	35.9
	30 and more years	4.0	3.7	26.2
	No work seniority	18.4	17.7	27.1

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2008.

Table No. 11: Indicators of poverty risk in households without and with children in years 2010-2011

Specification	Per cent of households at risk of poverty: expenses below					
	Subsistence minimum		Relative poverty line		Legal poverty line	
	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
General	5.7	6.7	17.1	16.7	7.3	6.5
1 person household	2.0	2.4	6.7	6.3	2.4	2.1
Marriage:						
No children	1.6	1.7	6.1	5.5	1.0	0.8
With 1 child	1.9	2.3	7.4	6.7	1.9	1.6
With 2 children	3.7	4.8	14.7	13.8	5.4	4.7
With 3 children	9.8	10.4	27.5	25.8	14.1	12.2
With 4 and more children	24.0	24.0	43.7	47.2	34.3	29.6
Single parent	7.8	7.2	18.4	19.2	10.5	6.9

Source: Bieñkuńska 2012

The impact of family structure on protective capacity

The quality of life of the families is determined by the ability to cover their consumption needs. The EU-SILC 2011 research provides information about financial problems of Polish

families that prevent them from covering their needs, which are considered as standard in other EU countries. The research reveals that over 50% households in Poland cannot pay for unexpected expenses of 900 PLN.

The protective capacity of family is very much influenced by its structure. In Poland still the biggest risk of poverty is connected to the unemployed status, especially when the unemployed person was the head of the family. Numerous families are definitely most threatened by poverty and the increase of that risk is striking. Single-parent households are far less at risk and the percentage of mono-parental families endangered by poverty is slightly higher than general statistics of all social groups. The case of numerous single-parent families is not shown in the statistics however it may be presumed that those families are at even higher risk of poverty.

In the view of key respondents (03 and 015), the numerous families with unemployed parents may be relatively well protected by financial and in-kind support: family allowances and different types of additional benefits – housing, school handbooks, school meals. The family must be active in contacts with social assistance and school administration. In case of temporary allowances the family must be diagnosed as dysfunctional, in addition to low income.

The criterion of family dysfunction gained social interest recently when media reveal several cases of children taken from their families to foster families. The social assistance officials argued that the biological parents were too poor to provide good standard of living to their children. However the costs of placing a child in foster family are higher than family allowances, what makes the situation paradoxical. One of the new solutions, which is very slowly implemented, is the position of family assistant, who is to support chosen families in everyday life (house management, home budget etc). Finding suitable people for that job has been a challenge so far (09).

Key respondents (03, 013, 016) point out that during the last 20 years a phenomenon of intergenerational poverty has arisen and expanded. Social assistance offices are in contact with three generations of beneficiaries. There are also examples of children of beneficiary families who decided to choose occupation of social workers.

Although family does not have a strong protective capacity and the second, third child increases the risk of poverty, the system of family policy and social assistance strongly relies on family bonds. The issue of childcare, especially for children 0-3 years old was shifted to families, with explanation basing on traditional notion of intergenerational support. The state used to treat the unpaid intergenerational support provided by grandmothers as a resource that enables to cut the public childcare costs. The trend started to change recently, with more money put to public childcare. However social assistance still seems to perceive families as the care resources that relieve the duty of public childcare provision.

1.2. The impact of the economic crisis since 2007

The economic crisis in Europe affects to some extent Polish economy but takes rather a form of an economic downturn. Not without significance for ability to tackle the crisis is the inflow of EU structural funds. It is estimated that in 2004-2006 about 37% of employment growth might have been attributed to the impact of the EU Structural Funds (Raport Końcowy, 2007). Ministry of Regional Development reported that the number of employed increased in

2010 to 315 thousand thanks to cohesion policy funding (Evidence - based conclusions, 2011).

Politicians from the main governing party "Civic Platform" were eager to state that the Polish economy is a "green island" of success in the combat against the crisis in Europe. Now the rhetoric has changed into justifying limiting the social spending by the crisis (Interviews No. 01, 012). A good example of this approach is freezing the Labour Fund and arguing that there is a need to prepare for the economic crisis and rising unemployment, which may cause growing pressure on unemployment benefits. Apart from that, the government's disagreement to increase thresholds entitling to benefits in the years 2009 – 2012 because of the threat of crisis has contributed to a reduction in the number of beneficiaries.

Employers express fear of the incoming crisis and do not employ new workers (Interview No. 011). This way the crisis influenced the re-emergence of "the employers'" labour market. Polish economy is an example of increased productivity without increasing employment. Unemployment remains a big problem in case of persons over 50 years of age and graduates with no experience. Those categories of job-seeking are rejected by the employers during the crisis.

2. Institutional and Policy Legacies in National Anti-Poverty Policy

2.1. The minimum income protection architecture in the mid-2000s

2.1.1. The development of the role of means-tested provision in the national social protection system since 1945

Poland - like other post-communist countries - has solved the problem of poverty in a particular way before 1989. There has not been any developed social policy, because full employment allowed the vast majority of working to earn a minimum income, sufficient to support oneself and eliminate poverty, although the overall living level was low at that time. A strong thesis is also formulated that Polish welfare state is rooted in the social insurance system (Inglot 2008). One should note that a deviation from this model in the socialist period was the abolition of unemployment insurance due to conviction that full employment policy was the key remedy for all.

Security systems in the socialist period consisted of three components: benefits depend on earnings, benefits for a more egalitarian redistribution of income (e.g. family benefits, and the minimum and maximum amount of pensions) and benefits additional to wage provided by the employer through the official trade unions (Inglot 2008: 51).

Wages and full employment were social in nature and the prices of many articles were subsidized (Golinowska, Topińska 2002: 13). Companies (with the exception of a marginal private sector) formed the so-called social fund and housing capital fund, and developed an expenditure plan based on these funds (Morecka 2003: 294). It was accompanied by a delivery system of social services based on a developed infrastructure (such as holiday centres, nurseries, kindergartens cultural and sport centres, collective and family housing for employees (ibid. 295).

The maintenance of this infrastructure became too costly for factories in the 1980s but the public continued to accept this way of meeting needs and sustained the belief that state employers should conduct this type of activity (ibid.: 295). Although there were variations in the availability of benefits and services, their delivery was based on individual needs - the recipients could not refer to the legal entitlements for assistance, but their needs, if they were in a relatively disadvantaged position, were taken into account. For example, family holidays for low-income workers have been funded at a higher level than for those with relatively higher earnings.

Social assistance system was viewed as complementary to the social insurance system. In years 1944 – 1989, the ‘medical’ character of the system was sustained. Social assistance was not an independent institution but a part of centralised departmental structure (as part of health care system) and territorial administration. It lacked own legal basis regarding rules of benefits dissemination as well as organizational basis for activity (Szumlicz 1989).

The heritage of the former system was not adjusted to market economy – mainly because people without work were excluded from it. This is crucial since the main cause of poverty in Poland has from the very beginning of transformation been unemployment and economic inactivity, or work in the shadow economy without access to social services in the workplace and to the social security system. The unemployed and inactive persons in difficult situations became clients of social welfare, or beneficiaries of the insurance benefits.

The system before 1989 may be characterised as socialist workfare: social insurance was linked to work; working place played the main role both in income redistribution and social assistance. The rest of people in need of help were treated as “medicalised” cases. The system was deeply unprepared for the poverty caused by unemployment and lack of occupational activity, which was an effect of market intimidation.

The basic difference between free market countries and countries of real socialism was that in the first case, the social security and welfare of citizens were provided through intervention into consumption sphere, whereas in the second case, more emphasis was put on the primary distribution of GDP on the production level, which was achieved by method of full employment. The sureness of work was the basis of social security system. The state also surcharged to the prices of basic goods and services and to the almost universal access to free or low-fee social services with additional system of social benefits, in case of random circumstances. Regarding the dominant role of state in setting the level of wages, there was no need for mechanisms correcting division of income by social benefits.

The economy transformation („Balcerowicz Plan”) introduced in 1990 – 1993 based on the view that social policy is a burden to both state and local government budget, as it generates social and administrative expenses. In result the social state expenses were successively cut because of restrictive fiscal and budgetary policy (Rosati 1998; Kołodko 2008). Original frames of real socialist welfare state were kept, with high level of centralisation of social insurances management and concentration of decision process.

2.1.2. The structure of minimum income provisions for working-age people

The functioning of social assistance was regulated immediately after the systemic change, by the social assistance act passed in 1990 (amended numerous times later on). The obligation to organise and maintain social assistance was prescribed to the state and local government (*gmina*), which were obliged to cooperate with social organisations, religious organizations, charity organizations, foundations and private persons and volunteers. The role of local government in providing social assistance was a consequence of local government act (1990) in which *gminas* were obliged to organise social assistance issues, including social care homes.

Access to most of the social assistance benefits has – from the beginning of transformation - been based on two types of criteria, which should be fulfilled simultaneously. First is criteria of low material status. Second, additional circumstances such as orphanage, homelessness, protection of motherhood, unemployment, physical or mental disability, long-term illness, helplessness in care and education issues and in running household (especially in case of single parents or numerous families), problems with social inclusion after stay in prison, ecologic and natural catastrophe.

The social assistance act introduced entitlement to benefits: money benefits, in kind benefits as well as social work. It gave social workers relative freedom in making discretionary decisions concerning the amount and period of time to disburse money allowances. Money benefits, as well as social services were designed as one of the crucial instruments of social work with clients and their families. The debate on social assistance benefits focused more on clients than on ways of support. The problem of proper targeting of benefits was more discussed which seemed understandable considering the great change of the social policy paradigm – from universalistic to selective (Tomes 1995). The effects of social assistance

benefits were not so closely analysed – therefore the system lacked monitoring and evaluation. Several available money benefits of different value were usually close to the income threshold. Especially the temporary allowance raised controversies because of its very low level. Most stable allowances were offered to the disabled persons and their families. The category of working poor was not presented explicitly however as social workers admitted, the correlation between low incomes and additional criteria was very high (Golinowska 2002).

The period of economic transformation influenced setting the range of issues for social assistance. During the 1990s, more and more cases were transferred to social assistance because of “rationalisation” processes (Golinowska 2002) in the functioning of public institutions. It effected in transferring out the persons, who were not fitting in the institutional schedule anymore: e.g. social problems of pupils were not a part of educational system, social and assistance problems were not covered by health care system.

In 1990’s social assistance offices were transformed and their statues changed. First of all, their legal status changed so that they could independently apply for funds and manage them. Second of all, due to the fact that they were moved to the local government system, their access to public funds was limited as the local governments struggled with lack of financial stability. Services were provided in forms of social care homes, day care centres, care at home for permanently sick, shelters, and warm lunches for school age children and support in achieving economic independence. In case of social assistance social workers, nurses, NGO animators became the main providers.

Expenses on social assistance in Poland have been relatively very low. Money transfers still dominated, with the highest percentage of allowances for families of disabled persons. Low percentage of expenses on services (nursing, treatment and care, care and education, therapy and advisory) was one of the biggest problems in functioning of the system. The concept of social assistance encountered serious problems in realisation. The insufficiency of public means influenced the practice of social assistance. The broad range of facultative decisions in distribution of allowances enabled to adjust expenses to limited financial means of state budget and local governments. Insufficient number of social workers limited their work, especially in regions with high unemployment. Among other problems, the lack of cooperation between institutions of social assistance and other social institutions was quite striking.

Table No. 12: Consolidated public expenditures on social assistance in Poland

Years	1990	1993	1997	2000
Percentage of GDP	0.2	0.6	0.4	0.4
Percentage of money transfers and in kind	99	90.5	91	90.2
Percentage of services	1	9.5	9	9.8

Source: Golinowska/Topińska 2001

The basic goals of the system were expressed in the act of social assistance in 1990: help for persons and families who could not overcome their difficult situation, support in the process of self-independence and social reintegration, counteracting the situations that are the cause of problems. Social assistance should offer care and decent living conditions to persons who are unable to function independently due to their state of health, age or dysfunctions. For

people who could be employed social assistance should offer support focused on social and occupational reintegration. Social assistance was seen in political debate as the most effective instrument of dealing with social problems, which is characteristic for the liberal model of social policy. It is based on the idea that the state should limit its activity in social sphere to the selective social programs (social assistance) and resign from general programs based on mutual support. In 1990s the range of duties and obligations of social assistance was consecutively broadened, introducing new benefits and programs. Lack of family policy, limits in the pedagogical and social functions of schools, problems with health care system and housing policy – were all transferred to social assistance domain. Social assistance act was supported by other acts regarding the performance of social services. In the beginning of '90s the unemployment act was introduced, then unemployment and employment act, and since mid -90s – act on employment and preventing unemployment. It obliged local PES to run employment agencies, organise public works, intervention works, to offer credits for self-employment, organize trainings and activate unemployed through special programs and job clubs. However the activity of local PES was concentrated on two tasks: registering unemployed, administrating the register and granting allowances and pre-pension benefits. The shield activities, which consumed most of the financial means for the labour market activity, were the basic instruments of labour market (Rybka 2006).

The means-tested poverty criterion raised many doubts and was viewed as insufficient (Frieske 1996). Income criterion was described as parametric (unlike normative and empiric). The income threshold was at first set in relation to minimum pension: income per person could not be higher than 90%, and then 100% minimum pension. In 1996 a quota system of setting income threshold was introduced. It was based on the level of minimum pension and increased every year according to inflation rate. Introduction of consumption units based on scales of OECD was some kind of a novelty. Income in the family was calculated with the traditional equivalency scales of OECD: 1.0 for the first person, 0.7 for the second and further over 15 years old, 0.5 for each child. For single person a Polish criterion: 1.1 was set. In effect children's needs were marginalised (Szukiejłóć-Bienkuńska 2002).

Family policy was included to the domain of social assistance since family allowances were excluded from the social security system and benefits were income-tested. In the beginning family benefits were supposed to be divided on the basis of „quality” of the family. Families with dysfunctions were under the protection of social assistance system whereas general family policy was under central administration (concept from 1997-2001). In 1999, an institution Family Assistance Centres was created which evoked discussion if helping children and families is the same issue as fighting poverty (Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004)

Family policy in the time of economic transformation had a selective character with a weak recognition of the families' problems in changing reality. It was mostly based on a notion of parents' right to raise and educate their children. In practice it made family responsible for their fate and limited the responsibility of state institutions for family issues.

The state's entitlement to social and family policy was decentralised regarding organization, administration and financing of many social services: nurseries, kindergartens, elementary schools, culture centres, sports and recreation. Those duties were transferred to local governments, which had insufficient organizational and financial means. It effected in decisions of closing the institutions or raising the fees.

Table No. 13: Types of benefits defined in social assistance act from 1990 with further amendments

Type of benefit	Access criteria	Reason and purpose	Amount of money
Social disability pension	No income threshold,	Doctor's opinion, for persons who were born disabled or became disabled in the childhood or adolescence. Its length is described in doctor's opinion.	250 PLN
Permanent allowance	Income threshold for single person: 275 PLN, for the first person in family: 250 PLN, for second and more (over 15 yrs old): 175 PLN, for every person under 15 yrs old. 125 PLN	Granted in cases of being out of employment because of taking care of child that need permanent care, if the child is entitled to care allowance.	250 PLN
Permanent allowance – equalizing	Income threshold	For persons entirely incapable to undertake job who receive low benefits.	Up to income threshold
Guaranteed temporary allowance	Income threshold	Granted after expiration of unemployment benefit if a person takes care of child and is a single parent or the husband/wife are unemployed.	Difference between income threshold and received income
Temporary allowance	Income threshold	Long-term illness, disability, long-term unemployment.	Granted on the basis of social worker's assessment and depending on possessed means;
Earmarked allowance:	Income threshold	Cover purchasing of medicines, medical treatment, apartment restoration, purchase of fuel, clothing, child care (nursery, kindergarten), in case of accident or ecological catastrophe, for gaining economic independence.	Granted facultatively, depending on possessed means, usually granted once.

Declared principles and selective activities did not include situation of families that experienced impoverishment and unemployment. On the one hand, the new social assistance system was introduced to help poor families. On the other hand, the rule of universal family allowances with no indexation of their level caused decrease of its real value.

The aim of family policy was to broaden the protection of families living in difficult conditions. Family allowances were the dominant instrument granted on the basis of income testing. Family policy in mid - 90s was based on rules of protecting poor families, selectiveness of benefits granting, equality of benefits for women and men, supporting demographic processes.

Family allowances

In 1989 system of family allowances was set on the universalistic rules with no income test and level set parametrically. However only 3 years later quotas were introduced which resulted in decrease of real value.

Rules of granting family allowances changed quite frequently. Introduced in 1947, were supposed to help families with raising their children. The differences based on number of children were a symptom of egalitarian role of the system. Since 1970 the level of allowance depended on number of children and level of income per person in the family. The level of allowance was set as a quota and the basic level was set in 1963 and not changed up to 1984. In result of the increase of expenses this benefit lost its income-creating meaning.

The main reform of family allowance took place in mid - 90s with introduction of income test. Family allowances became social benefits, financed by central budget (previously from social security system). The level was set as a quota, dependant on the number of children and was supposed to be valorised by the index of goods and services prices.

Housing benefits

In the beginning housing benefits were designed as social shield in the time of liberalization of prices and tariffs, limiting subsidies. They are regulated by income-test and additional criteria: apartment surface and the range of expenses. In 1995 housing allowances were excluded from the social assistance system and controlled by Housing Office on central level and on local level – they were controlled by *gmina* administration as *gmina's* tasks. Regarding lack of clear strategy in general housing policy, the housing allowances were insufficient and did not protect poor people from evictions (which has not changed).

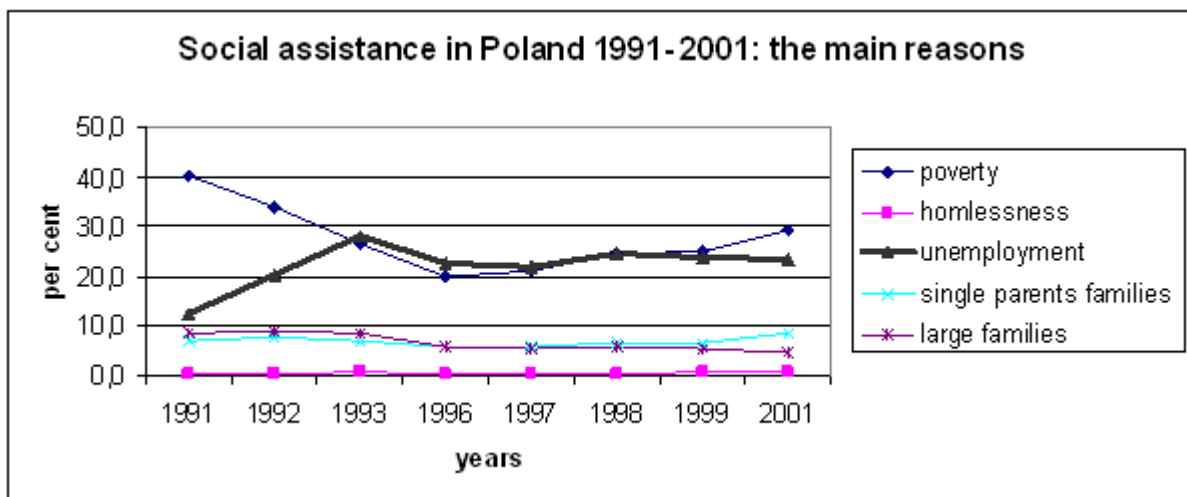
Financing of MIP

The first stage of decentralisation process introduced in the 1990 act was basically of organisational and not financial character. The organisational tasks were prescribed to local governments whereas financial means remained at the central level. The central government granted donations and subventions to local governments from central budget. This mechanism did not take into account regional differences in poverty and unemployment. The local governments had tasks and competences (decisions) however there were no legal paragraphs regulating financing local government budgets and functioning of their finances. Local governments were legally independent and self-governing but in-fact materially dependant on the central government administration. In consequence the local governments had no instruments to create and implement strategies aimed at solving social problems and influencing the development of local labour markets.

System of financing social assistance after 1990 was shaped by two tendencies (Rybka 2006). The first was to increase the financial means for social assistance – which was due to the fact that social assistance range of tasks was significantly broadened. The second tendency was based on giving local governments more financial responsibility with lowering the level of financial means transferred from the central budget. Therefore the participation of local budgets in social assistance has been increasing gradually – to fulfil all the tasks described in the social assistance act.

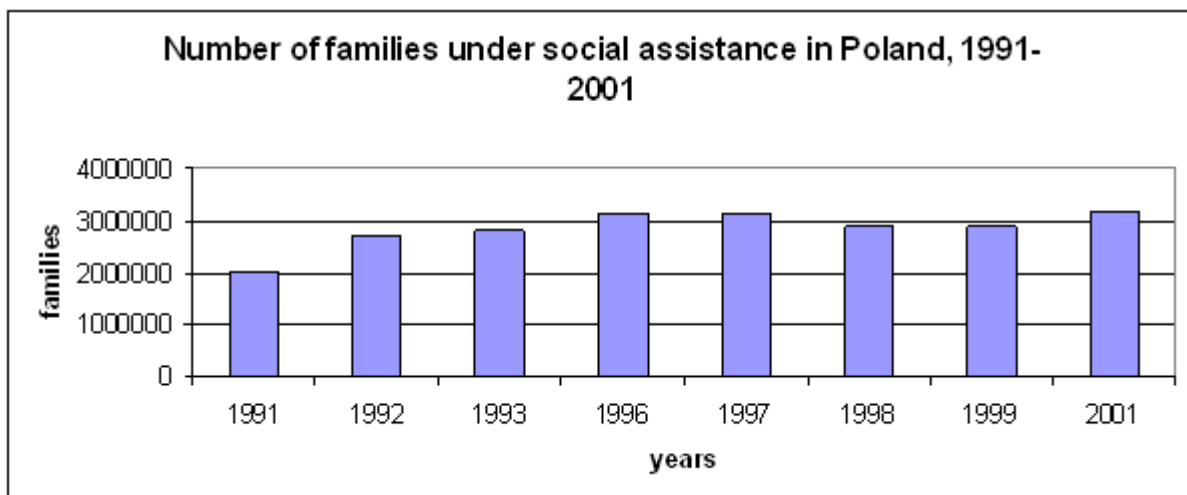
The majority of benefits were distributed on the level of *gmina*, as “ordered tasks” and “own tasks”. *Gmina*’s own tasks were financed from *gmina* budget, subsidised in majority from central budget. The local government institutions’ incomes consisted of own incomes, earmarked subsidies for ordered tasks, additional financing and general subsidies. Local government own incomes came from the shares in CIT and PIT. General subsidy covered most expenses of the local government tasks. In case of social assistance majority of money came from central subsidy. This subsidy served as a means to realise tasks formulated by the state, according to state’s priorities.

Figure No. 6: Main reasons for granting social assistance in years 1991-2001



Source: Broda-Wysocki 2003: 312

Figure No. 7: Number of families benefiting from social assistance in years 1991-2001



Source: Broda-Wysocki 2003:312

Joint expenses for benefits in years 1991- 2001 increased systematically from 336,8 million PLN to 3213,4 million PLN. The increase of expenses was not even, which was a result of

changes in range of obligations of social assistance and partly because of financial situation of the state. The expenses of the local governments increased systematically, over a dozen per cent each year. The tendency to increase the share of expenses of local budget in overall expenses was visible: from 24.8% in 1991 to 38.7% in 2001.

In the decade of 90's, the share of different expenditures in general social assistance expenditures changed. The share of expenditures on poverty decreased from 40.3% to 29.1%. The per cent of support for unemployed increased from 12.4% to 23.3%. The percentage of benefits for numerous families decreased from 8.5% to 4.5%, whereas the support for single parent families increased from 7.1% to 8.1% (Broda, Wysocki 2003:12). On the *gmina* level, the expenses on social assistance benefits increased from 8 300 000 PLN in 1999 to 913 000 000 PLN in 2001 (Błędowski 2002).

MIP system reform in mid 2000s

In the beginning of 2000s first attempts were made to change the existing income criteria for social and family benefits. The system of calculating them was considered not transparent (even *ad hoc*) and too differentiated (Deniszuk, Kurowski, Stryc 2007). In 2002 two new thresholds were established: the so-called Family Income Support Basket (*Koszyk Wsparcia Dochodowego Rodzin*) and the Threshold for Social Intervention (*Próg Interwencji Socjalnej*). The first was close to the social minimum – it was calculated with reference to the real expenditure of families placed within the second quintile of income distribution. It exceeded it slightly, because higher expenditures on culture and education have been assumed. The main aim was to take into consideration the developmental needs of children (Deniszuk, Kurowski, Stryc 2007). The second was close to the subsistence minimum (absolute poverty line). It was calculated with a reference to the low-income households: first a basket of services and commodities was constructed on the basis of minimum norms and then it was compared to the expenditures of families from the first quintile of income distribution. Both of the thresholds were planned as a reference point for indicating legal income criteria entitling to benefits. However, it was only in 2004 when the legal framework to implement this was established.

In 2004 significant legal changes in Minimum Income Protection were introduced⁷. Social assistance benefits were separated from family benefits. The main reason behind this decision was to “avoid unjustified accumulation of benefits covering similar functions and allowing monitoring of the revenue-dependent benefits system as a whole” (Parliament, Vol.1555 cited after Starega, Wóycicka 2005). In consequence, the system of social assistance benefits was simplified. In case of family benefits, one income criterion was indicated for all types of allowances (instead of wide spectrum of different criteria). Also the system of financing was reconstructed to adjust it to the reform of administrative structure, which entered into force in 1999⁸.

Moreover, for the first time a *quasi* guaranteed minimum income was included in the legal framework: temporary allowance became an obligatory payment (to a limited amount)

⁷ By two legal documents were introduced: Social Assistance Act and Family Benefits Act. Both became binding from May 1, 2004.

⁸ Three levels of self-government were introduced: *gminy* – which existed from 1990 (communities, NUTS V level), *poviats* (districts, NUTS IV), *voivodships* (regions, NUTS II); and the number of regions was reduced from 49 to 16. This resulted in a completely new division of competences in most of the areas including social policy.

provided that the income criterion and the additional criterion entitling to financial support (from a legally defined list of criteria) was fulfilled. It was calculated as a part of the individual income gap between the legal poverty line (income criterion) and the income of family or person. In 2004 it was no less than 20% of the income gap for a single person household and no less than 15% for a multi-person. It rose in 2005 to no less than 30% and 20% and in 2006-2007 to 35% and 25% respectively. From 2008 it equals 50% in both cases. The guaranteed part of the individual income gap is financed from the central budget, but the local governments may decide to supplement it from their own budgets.

New system of allowances

Since 2004 MIP consists of two core types of benefits: temporary allowance and earmarked allowance. It is supplemented by other forms of social protection such as family benefits and housing benefits (mostly in-kind). Most of them are means-tested⁹, but the income criteria for granting them vary.

Means-testing and the poverty line

In case of benefits from social assistance the income criterion is set with a reference to the Threshold of Social Intervention (TSI) discussed above. After calculating it by the experts the legal poverty line is then negotiated during the proceedings of the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Issues. If the Commission is unable to reach a consensus the government makes the decision. In consequence of the negotiations the poverty line is almost always slightly above the absolute poverty line (subsistence minimum).

This method of setting the income criterion is frequently criticized from several reasons (see Wóycicka 2009). First of all it depicts the needs of people as limited to food and housing, not taking into consideration wider spectrum, i.e. medicine, fuel, electricity, etc. Second of all, the data according to which it is set are published with a large delay and are, thus, not representative to the actual models of consumption of the households from lower quintile. Finally, the regional differences are not reflected in the method – which is important provided then there are significant discrepancies in the costs of living across Poland (op.cit.).

MIP reforms and AI

Some of the reformatory steps taken in the beginning of 2000s aimed at linking MIP with AI. The Act on social services from 2004 included the possibility to sign the so called social contracts. This meant that social workers could grant benefits and offer support conditionally: e.g. the family would receive temporary allowance provided that the father regularly took part in AA meetings or that the mother registered in employment office.

Also new forms of activation were offered to the most excluded groups. First of all, from 2004¹⁰ local units and NGOs gained the possibility to establish Centres of Social Inclusion and Clubs of Social Inclusion. The former were directed to people in the most difficult situations – long term unemployed, alcohol or drugs addicts, mentally ill, disabled, homeless, etc. They proposed more long-term and complex programmes than standard ALMP instruments, including various types of counselling and support groups aiming at solving personal problems and learning basic social and economic skills, individual support during

⁹ Not all types of family allowances are means-tested.

¹⁰ The Act on social employment entered into force.

vocational training, etc. The latter were at the first place addressed to people who signed social contracts with social assistance and offered mainly assistance in job seeking and various forms of counselling.

Table No. 14: Summary of the most important reforms

Year	Type of reform	Content
2003	Act on family allowances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of new income criterion for means-tested benefits, close to social minimum.
2004	Act on social assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of new way of setting the income criterion: computation of the subsistence minimum; negotiations in the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Issues resulting in indication of legal poverty line (income criterion for MIP allowances); if consensus is not reached, the legal poverty line is set by the government (cannot be lower than the initial proposal). • Introduction of guaranteed minimum income equalling 50% of the income gap between income of a person or a family and the legal income criterion. • Introduction of social contracts.
	Act on social employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibility to establish Centres and Clubs of Social Inclusion.
	Amendment to the Act on cooperatives from 1982 and on the basis of the act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 2004. In 2006 a separate Act on social cooperatives came into force.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibility to create social cooperatives.
2005	Amendment to the Act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 2004.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to socially useful works, directed to MIP beneficiaries without the right to unemployment benefits.

Second of all, a new form of employment was introduced – a social cooperative¹¹. It was directed to the unemployed registered in local PES as well as people at risk of social exclusion or socially excluded (homeless, drug and alcohol addicts, mentally ill, former convicts, refugees, disabled) – 50% of members of social cooperative had to belong to those groups. It was planned as an attractive form of economic activity because of fairly simple and democratic structure of organisation and low costs of functioning in comparison with regular companies. There was also a possibility to gain financial support from local PES for its establishment. Nevertheless, the beginnings were difficult and many social cooperatives collapsed shortly after their set up¹² (Gawska, Jędrak, Gruntowski 2012).

Finally, in 2005 new form of employment was introduced, called socially useful works¹³. It was addressed to the unemployed without a right to unemployment benefits but taking social assistance allowances. They were to be organised by communes (*gminas*, NUTS II) and take no longer than 10 hour per week, with salary not less than 7.70 PLN gross per hour.

To sum up, the system implemented in mid - 2000s entailed crucial changes. Social assistance benefits were separated from family benefits. In consequence, the system of social assistance benefits was simplified. In the case of family benefits, one income criterion was indicated for all types of allowances (instead of wide spectrum of different criteria). Temporary allowance became an obligatory payment in particular situations.

2.2. The extent and structure of ALMP in the mid-2000s

Lisbon Strategy recommendations were the basis of at least 20% of spending on active labour market programs. Situation has started to improve in Poland since 2004. The possibility to benefit from the support of the European Social Fund and the decrease of the unemployment rate helped to reinforce active labour market policies. In addition, the European Social Fund was essentially allocated on ALMP. However, in recent years the share of the European Social Fund in financing programs fluctuates significantly (less than 3% of spending in 2008, compared with 12% in 2006 and 2007) (Hurley 2010: 9), and 11% in 2011¹⁴.

Spending on active labour market programs has been growing until 2009. The expenses decreased between 2010 to 2012, at a time when unemployment started to rise again and the need for active policies became greater.

Expenditure on active policies is difficult to characterise in terms of the well-known typologies due to the lack of sufficiently reliable data. In years 2005-2010 there was no single dominant strategy. As in the case of many other EU countries different strategies were implemented in order to find remedies (Bonoli 2010). A large part of the expenditure in 2005-2010 was devoted mainly to three strategies highlighted by Bonoli ("employment assistance", "occupation/training for unemployed" and "human capital investment" with a weaker focus on the "incentives strategy"). The "incentives" strategy (strengthen positive and

¹¹ Introduced by the amendment to the Act on cooperatives from 1982 and on the basis of the act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 2004. In 2006 a separate Act on social cooperatives came into force.

¹² Many of the social cooperatives were established in a framework of programmes financed from ESF and did not last after it had finished.

¹³ It was introduced with the amendment to the Act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 2004.

¹⁴ <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/praca/fundusz-pracy/zestawienie-przychodow-i-wydatkowfp-za-lata-2005-2011-i-plan-2012/>

negative work incentives for people on benefit) is ineffective because of the large shadow economy and the impact of high unemployment.

Table No. 15: ALMP expenses from Labour Fund

Specification	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Share of expenses for ALMP (without for young workers expense)	0.29	0.38	0.46	0.55	0.58	0.58	0.25

Source: Own accounting on: <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/praca/fundusz-pracy/zestawienie-przychodow-i-wydatkowfp-za-lata-2005-2011-i-plan-2012/>

Table No. 16: Structure of ALMP spending (2005-2011 together)

Specification	%	Sum
Job creation in private sector	6	37%
Job creation in public sector	7	
Funds to start a business activity	9	
Refund for employers the cost of compensation for young workers	5	
Equipping workstations	10	
Trainings	7	35%
Initial trainings, internships, scholarships	16	
Vocational education	8	
Postgraduate internships of physicians and nurses	4	

Source: Own accounting on: <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/praca/fundusz-pracy/zestawienie-przychodow-i-wydatkowfp-za-lata-2005-2011-i-plan-2012/>

Box 3: Vulnerable groups in 2004

Vulnerable groups:

- Unemployed below 25 year of age,
- Long-term unemployed,
- Unemployed over 50 years of age,
- Unemployed without vocational skills,
- Unemployed single parents with at least one child under 7,
- Unemployed disabled people.

Source: Act of employment promotion and labour market institutions from 2004.

In 2004, six vulnerable groups were introduced, which were given preferential access to ALMP. The catalogue has been slightly expanded over the years (for details see section 4.2.3). Long-term unemployed as well as single parents with children in pre-school age were included. Working poor remained a group completely ignored by the act.

2.3. The extent and structure of other services of potential relevance to working-age minimum income claimants in the mid-2000s

2.3.1. General childcare provisions and specialised support services for single parents

The lack of public funds for social services and limiting state responsibility for raising and educating children under 6 years old led to increase the participation of parents in financing social services. In effect, lower number of children have been attending to care institutions. According to the Eurostat (2009) only 2% of children 0-2 attend nurseries and according to Polish Ministry of Education, only 59% of children 3-5 attend kindergartens. In situation of low supply of places in nurseries and kindergartens, local governments set additional criteria for admission – the most common ones are employment of parents and being a single parent, both groups are given the priority in the recruitment process. The attendance to a public nursery is for fee and public kindergartens offer 5 hours of unpaid care (between 8-13) and the rest hours are paid (the level depends on local government). Nurseries and kindergartens offer several cold and warm meals for children, for low fee. Poor families may apply for lower fees (day care and food) and each case is analysed individually.

Local PES support

Unemployed single parents with children under 7 may receive refund for childcare costs up to half of the unemployment benefit. (PLN 358.5) per child in case if they: 1) take up job (or subsidised employment), apprenticeship, on-the-job training, training; and 2) do not earn more than a minimum wage.

Reduction of fees and priority in access to public day care facilities are the only instruments focused on single parents and their ability to combine work and family. The problem is the number of childcare facilities, which is still highly insufficient.

Family benefits

Since 2004 family allowances constitute a separate system of transfers. Not all of them are means tested¹⁵. However, family benefits – which work as a support for low-income families with children – are granted with a reference to an income criterion. It is a bit higher than the legal poverty line.

Non means-tested and financial support for the families – and alimony support

Families are entitled to several non-means tested benefits, such as birth allowance, maternity and paternity allowance. Single parents are entitled to Alimony support in case their ex-partner does not pay alimonies – the support is means-tested.

¹⁵ One-time benefit granted on account of childbirth (1000 PLN) and nursing allowance (520 PLN) do not have an income criterion, but there are plans to introduce it.

Birth allowance: introduced in 1954 for women workers and wives of workers, as a once paid allowance on the level of triple and then (since 1983) double family allowance. Birth allowance was liquidated in 2002. However, families receiving family allowance have the right to a one time birth allowance. In 2006 the state increased the financial support connected with the birth of a child – by rising the amount of means-tested supplement to family allowance due to childbirth (from 500 to 1000).

Single birth allowance (“baby bonus”) – allowance for parents or legal carers, regardless their employment status and incomes. It is paid once for the birth of child, in the amount of 1000 PLN. It was introduced in 2006. In the beginning of 2013 an income threshold (no more than 1922 PLN per person in family monthly) was introduced to exclude families with higher earnings. Local authorities may also grant additional “baby bonus”.

Maternity allowance: was introduced in 1970s. The length of maternity leave was prolonged in 1999 (5 months for the first child) and reduced to previous length in 2001 (4 months), from 2010 it lasts 4,5 months with facultative 1,5 month. The maternity leave and period of collecting allowance were extended, then shortened in 2002, and then extended again. It is granted on the basis of childbirth and adoption of child up to 7 years old. It may be obtained by persons entitled to sickness benefits, working on the basis of contract of employment, agency contract, contract of mandate, self-employment. Maternity allowance is 100% of wage. In case of unemployed with benefits, the period of payment is prolonged for a time of regular maternity leave (Uścińska 2008; Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004).

Paternity allowance: introduced in 2010 for the father, regulated on the same basis as maternity allowance, except that it lasts 2 weeks.

Alimony state support: It was created in 1975 to help families who could not execute alimonies from persons obliged to pay them. The Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) managed it. The first criterion was income per person in family and the level was increased consequently. The level of benefits was set in quota and the upper limit was the level of alimonies set in court. In 90s the income-test was cancelled, than introduced again, the income criterion was set parametrically, than by quota, and with increased upper level of benefit. In 2003 Alimony Fund was liquidated with the new family benefits act. Instead, an alimony advance payment was introduced and widely criticised. It was beneficial for single parents with children up to 7 years old, unemployed without benefits. Single families who were entitled by court to obtain higher alimonies lost the chance to obtain higher allowances. Liquidation of Alimony Fund weakened the responsibility of person obliged to alimentation – previously the debt was owned to the state, now is owned to private person. The alimony advance payment is granted and financed by local government. The alimony debtors may lose driving licence as a form of punishment and since 2009 they are registered in national debtors register, available for all banks and financial institutions – which means, that they cannot take money credits. From October 2008 previous beneficiaries of benefits of alimony advanced can receive benefit from the alimony fund (swiadczenie z funduszu alimentacyjnego). The system provides benefits for families when alimony from the other parent is not executed. The system was introduced on the 1st of October 2008. Most of the previous beneficiaries from the Alimony Advance received the benefit from alimony fund. New regulations on benefit from the alimony fund became enacted with Act of 17 September 2007 on support for persons entitled to alimony. It is paid when the execution of alimony granted by the court is ineffective. The fund is due, provided that the net monthly family income per capita (after the

deduction of tax and health contributions) does not exceed PLN 725 for person. Persons eligible for the alimony fund are: children up to 18 years old, or up to 25 years old, being a school or university student, or disabled persons, without age criteria, if a person presents a decision on considerable invalidity. The amount of the alimony fund is limited to the amount of the alimony granted by the court and cannot exceed PLN 500 per person. This benefit is paid also for children brought up in whole family.

2.3.2. General employment retention and advancement support and specialised support services for the working poor

Although, the issue of encouraging people to stay in-work recurs in the discourse, no measures have been taken to provide incentives for that¹⁶. The only form, which aims at supporting employment, is the so-called activation allowance (*dodatek aktywizacyjny*). It is reserved only to the unemployed receiving unemployment benefits and is granted in case of taking up part-time job below minimum wage proposed by employment services or finding job on one's own. It is paid for half or whole time in which unemployment benefit is due and equals maximally 50% of unemployment benefit.

There are no instruments in social assistance and social policy for working poor. There is no thinking that working poor are actually a problem. They vanish from the discussion because the discussion is focused on unemployed and it is the long – term unemployed who are in the centre. The trainings financed by EU funds are usually designed for long-term unemployed. What happens later, if they really found a job, is not a matter of interest to anyone. In Poland the most important indicators are the numbers of participants of the trainings, how many participants, how many trainings. We do not know how many of them actually found a job. Nobody counts how many persons participate in several cycles of trainings. (04)

In mid - 2000s the idea of life-long learning was not connected to working poor. All the efforts labour market policies and social assistance were focused on short-term and long-term unemployed. The WP might theoretically ask for the support of local PES however in reality the offers at employment office were usually low-paid and could only sustain WP status.

2.4. Governance of minimum income provision and related services in the mid-2000s

2.4.1. Administration and policy making

The administrative reform from 1999 and the new legal frameworks for labour market policy, social assistance and family assistance introduced in years 2003-2004 laid the foundations for the current system of governance of MIP and related policies. The system has been functioning on those basis until today. The responsibilities were shared between the central level and three territorial levels – regions (NUTSII), *poviats* (LAU1) and *gminas* (LAU 2). Territorial governments have been from the beginning relatively independent from the central government in shaping social policy, but – at the same time – limited by state's financing in the area of labour market policy and – to a smaller extent – social assistance, especially if their own incomes were low (see 3.3).

¹⁶ Governmental strategy from 2009 - "Poland 2030" - included a recommendation suggesting that an in-work benefit should be introduced to encourage people to stay in work, but no steps have been taken so far to implement it.

The central administrative level

The main actors in the area of social policy at the central administrative level are the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and the State Council of Social Assistance. The main central administrative body in this policy field is the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The Council of Ministers (CM) is the core executive body consisting of the Prime Minister and all the government ministers. In social policy its role is limited to the design and supervision of the budget. This is crucial as far as MIP is concerned, since state budget covers the costs of the guaranteed part of temporary allowances. It also decides about financing of the majority of supporting instruments such as ALMP and unemployment benefits (the Labour Fund), family allowances and housing benefits. Moreover, CM decides also about the financing of special governmental programmes such as currently implemented "State's Extra Meal Programme" directed to children under 7 years of age and families and people not exceeding 150% of legal income criterion for social assistance.

Another important task of the CM concerns determining the income criteria for MIP (and family allowances). It is to be negotiated in the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Issues. However, in the case when the compromise is not reached the CM makes the final decision about the amounts (of the income criterion for MIP and family allowances). The Minister of Labour and Social Policy performs programming and controlling functions in the area of social assistance, family assistance and labour market policy, among others: designing of legal framework, indicating standards of services and structure of social assistance, Public Employment Services and other units engaged in provision of services, organizing data collection, setting educational requirements for social workers and their further specialisation, preparing the specimen of social contract and social interview and indications for social interview, specifying control procedures and procedures concerning granting, withdrawing and suspending allowances, etc. The Council of Social Assistance and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy support minister in performance of those tasks.

The Council of Social Assistance is an advisory body consisting of the representatives of self-governments, social assistance institutions, trade unions and third sector organisations from various (not necessarily all) regions. It is selected by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy for a three year term. Among Council's main tasks are: providing opinions about draft legal acts and proposing legal changes, preparing expert analyses on various subjects concerning the area of social policy.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy performs tasks from three sections of public administration¹⁷: labour, family matters, social protection. It also gathers data from all administrative levels. Social policy and labour market policy are managed by different ministerial departments: the Department of Social Policy and Social Inclusion, the Department of Family Policy and the Department of Labour Market. Their main tasks are connected to realisation of each of the acts: respectively, on social assistance, on family allowances and on promotion of employment. As representatives of central administration they perform programming and some controlling functions: drawing up new policy arrangements and proposals of legal changes, preparing diagnoses and analyses from their fields, initiating research, verifying standards of social services, monitoring the performance

¹⁷ As defined by the Act on sections of public administration from 4th September 1997.

of social assistance tasks by self-government institutions and other units, preparation and monitoring of implementation of government programmes, in some cases serving as the instance of appeal etc. However, as far as the "Social" OMC is concerned there is a fourth department responsible for coordination – the Department of Economic Analyses and Prognoses. It was appointed this task probably because of its specific place in the structure of the Ministry – it is not assigned to a particular policy field. In general, this department is responsible for conducting research, preparing expert reports, coordination of data gathering, and supporting other departments in preparation of strategic documents.

Regions

Regions, called in Poland *Voivodships*, realise twofold functions: they serve as a representation of the central administration and as local governments. The first is performed by the governor (*voivode*), who is supported by the *voivodship* office. The second by the regional council and the administration of *voivodship*, is headed by the marshal. The governor carries out various controlling and supervising functions in the area social policy. Among other things: supervision over performance of social assistance units from all levels of local government, assessment of quality of services and implementation of standards of services, etc.

Whereas, the local governments of voivodeship are responsible – among other things – for preparation, implementation and actualisation of the regional strategies of social policy (being a part of the strategies of regional development), as well as regional strategies for solving social problems (to support *poviats* and *gminas* in this respect), diagnosing sources of poverty and assessing needs in the area of social assistance, etc. Moreover, they are also bound to establish and support financially regional social policy offices, responsible for coordination of strategies and policies at the regional level. Finally, local governments of *voivodships* are at the core of distributing and accounting for the resources from European Social Fund implemented in the framework of Operational Programme the Development of Human Capital (see Miś, Nóżka, Smagacz-Poziemska 2011).

Poviats, gminas and cities with the poviat status

The most important implementing functions are performed by local governments of *poviats* and *gminas*. The former represent the middle level of local government (LAU 1). They are responsible mainly for specialised services, such as care for the physically or mentally disabled, support of people having problems with adjustment (especially young people leaving children's homes and other facilities for youth), organisation of adoption matters, support of foster families, management of specialised facilities (also homes for under-age single mothers and pregnant women, sheltered flats, care facilities) and crisis intervention centres, etc. Those tasks are performed by Poviat Family Assistance Centres. They are also bound to prepare *poviat* strategies for solving social problems aiming at social inclusion of people from vulnerable groups (the disabled, the long-term unemployed).

What is important, *poviat* is also the administrative level at which local public employment services (local PES) operate. They are responsible for the delivery of employment services, i.e. payment of unemployment benefits, provision of ALMP job agency (employment consultancy, job seeking support, vocational trainings, apprenticeships, etc.).

Gminas (LAU 2) are responsible – among other things – for managing social, family and housing policy at the local level. They are supervising local social assistance offices (local SAO), which are the institutions responsible for the provision of MIP and social assistance services such as social work, counselling, support groups, etc. They are often obliged by the local authorities also to prepare local strategies for solving social problems and preparation of needs assessment in the area of social policy. Moreover, they are often providers of family benefits and sometimes housing benefit (depending on the system developed in a *gmina*).

There is also another institution operating at that level which should be mentioned – the Local Commission for Solving Alcohol Problems. One of its aims is social inclusion of people dependent on alcohol and drugs and enabling access to therapy.

Gminas finance also social assistance benefits (earmarked allowance, special earmarked allowance, not obligatory part of temporary allowance) accept from the guaranteed part of the temporary allowance and the permanent allowance (paid for people incapable to take up work), which are covered by the earmarked grant.

There is also another type of local government called a city with *poviat* status. It applies to the cities with over 100 000 inhabitants, former capitals of *voivodships* or cities in big agglomerations. They combine administrative functions of *gminas* and *poviats*. In those units *poviat* family assistance centres are amalgamated with local social assistance offices in an institution named municipal family assistance office. It performs tasks of the former and the latter.

Other institutions important in the governance of MIP

Important institutions in the system of governance of minimum income are Local Government Boards of Appeal. Those bodies are a part of juridical system, not territorial governments' system. Their role is to examine individual complaints on administrative decisions made by institutions from each self-government level – among other things – issues concerning denial or withdrawal of benefits.

2.4.2. Delivery

As mentioned above, the delivery system created in years 1999 – 2004 is based on two local administrative levels – *poviats* and *gminas*. Main responsibilities in the area of labour market policy were allocated in the former, whereas other policies – social assistance, family assistance (with the exception of specialised care) and housing – were mandated to the latter. This way issues connected to activation and financial transfers for the unemployed were isolated from functions such as MIP and other forms of support for people with low income (with some exception in case of cities with *poviat* status). Over the years, the problems of coordination between those areas have not been overcome (for details see 4.3.2.).

The main role in delivery was given to public bodies, which were entrusted with managing all transfers. However, private or third sector actors were included in the delivery of activation services as well as some social services. The system of selecting partners was based on open contests. Cost-efficiency – defined as the best quality for the lowest price – was the main logic of selecting contractors and no outcome based payments were taken into consideration. In general, the then established system of delivery in the area of social assistance as well as labour market policy is managed by rules rather than by objectives. Although there are

legally defined standards in some areas and the issue of quality of services is the central subject of control, the approach towards them is traditional-legalistic. The construction of those standards is slightly different in the area of social assistance and labour market institutions (Szarfenberg 2011). In case of the former, quality and standards refers to measures such as providing appropriate living or dietary conditions in social assistance houses or ensuring that there will be a sufficient number of social workers in comparison to the number of beneficiaries. In case of the latter, standards are procedural – consecutive actions demanded from employees are enumerated. In both cases, the process of delivering services as well as expectations of clients are not taken into consideration. In result, following the rules becomes a main driver of services' provision and control.

However, because of the high level of decentralisation the functioning of local institutions depends on the approach of their direct superiors and the *gmina* and *powiat* authorities (Koczur 2007). Therefore, there are cases of offices where management by objectives is introduced – on the initiative of the former or the latter – in the form of ISO 9000s (Krzyszkowski 2010). This is connected to the implementation of solutions used in private sector, such as setting goals and measurable indicators of quality, assessing client satisfaction, unifying procedures of service. However, ISO instruments are not always introduced with a full success and may limit efficiency – especially in smaller units (Krzyszkowski 2010).

3. The Dynamics of Active Inclusion Reform

3.1. The political construction of the reform agenda

The pressure on reforms in the areas connected to poverty and social exclusion from the wider public is limited. Media debates are centred on issues, which are potentially controversial or emotion-inducing. Poverty is often presented as connected to dysfunctions – especially in the context of large families, which are often depicted as having alcohol problems, violence or psychological problems, etc. Whereas, broadly conceived and informed discussions are rare.

Negative connotations of poverty in the media messages are linked to the tendency to picture it as individual's fault, which is emphasised in the interviews:

I would say that it is an attractive subject for the media, but in a wrong sense - to show that poverty is something bad and that the person probably deserved it.(04).

MIP claimants are often depicted as abusing the system – collecting benefits instead of taking up work. They are sometimes classified as having the mentality of a *homo sovieticus* – a person socialised in the previous political system, having no own initiative and expecting that the state will solve all the problems.

Unemployment seems to be a subject most often triggering the so called “blame discourse”. The standpoint according to which there are many “false” unemployed, i.e. people who do not want to work and prefer to live on social transfers or do not mind working illegally seems prominent. A good example of it may be the Social Diagnosis – quantitative panel studies prepared every two years, which are always broadly discussed in the media:

All the unemployed registered in employment offices may be divided into two large groups: the real and the false; the false, in turn, may be divided into those who are not interested in work (do not look for it or are not ready to take it up) and those working illegally or gaining income in another way (...) (Diagnoza Społeczna 2009, p. 320-321).

This way the problem is “individualised” and little consideration is given to possible systemic sources of illegal work or unemployment (e.g. employers wanting to avoid labour costs and thus forcing illegal work or insufficient number of kindergartens and crèches, etc.). At the same time, the demand to tighten regulations on social transfers as well as make them more conditional, so that only “deserving poor” could get it, is visible in the debate.

The subject which has recently been triggering more systemic reflection is ALMP. There seems to be a consensus in the media, as well as among politicians and social partners, that the money from Labour Fund and ESF are not being used properly: the quality of trainings and their adjustment to the labour market demands is strongly criticised.

Moreover, some of alarming cases are used instrumentally in the political struggle between the government and the opposition. As one of our interlocutors puts it:

(...) if they [the media] write about the issue of poverty they want to cause sensations. So they show, for example, some family with mental health problems and a lot of children, and these children are taken from them by some institution, right.(...) Things like this are used to lay in one's political opponent. So, for example, in a pathological family - if state authorities or social workers did not react in time and a child fell out of the window, or some other tragedy happened – politicians start to bash one another as if the current prime minister, and the current minister were to blame for this tragedy.(02).

Discussions concerning the most vulnerable groups concentrate on children. Most of the press articles, interviews with experts and television news concerning that subject occur when some alarming data showing that children and numerous families are at the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion or that large number of children in Poland are hungry is published (Tarkowska 2006; Pawłowska-Salińska 2012; Ćwiek 2013; Marczuk 2013b; Zubik 2013). The presence of this subject in the media is strongly emphasised in the interviews:

When poverty is discussed, the most popular subject of debates and media messages are always the children. (04).

Sometimes children are pictured in opposition to pensioners, who have been long considered as the most affected by the negative effects of transformation (Włodarski 2010; Marczuk 2013a). Meanwhile, according to the data children seem to be in much worse position. However, as stated in some of the interviews pensioners with minimum pension, should also be seen as a vulnerable group, since their struggle to support themselves is becoming more and more visible – their pensions are barely sufficient to pay the rent¹⁸:

“(...) in most of the cities with large number of communal buildings there is no strategy for seniors. And those people – there are more and more examples of retiring people, if its two people they are able to cope somehow. But when one person dies, the other is not able to pay the rent. We had a number of such situations, for example a women has been a nurse at the hospital for 35-37 years and here pension was sufficient just to cover the rent.” (014).

Moreover, as some of the respondents notice, the problem will soon become striking, since people with new pension scheme¹⁹ will start retiring – and their pensions will be significantly lower than this of “old scheme” pensioners. Similar “competition” for acknowledgment in the discourse concerns single parents and numerous families. This may be connected to a broader normative debate between the conservative (emphasizing the importance of traditional catholic family) and more liberal media.

The only subject eliciting broader discussion in the media, engaging all political sides, the President, trade unions and non-governmental organisations and translating into political actions seems to be demographic decrease. In this context issues such as situation of young people on the labour market and family policy are debated.

It has been emphasised that young people are subject to uncertain employment in the so called “junk jobs” – the already discussed civil contracts, which do not give people the rights

¹⁸ Communal flats are often too large to qualify a person for housing benefit and there is rarely a possibility to change it for smaller one.

¹⁹ Scheme based on the pension reform form 1999.

of employees (see 1.1.2). They are also facing high risk of unemployment and in-work poverty. This is perceived as the main reason of their reluctance to form families and have children. Alarming articles are being published enouncing that Polish women chose to give birth in Great Britain or Ireland instead of their home county, because of the low level of security offered by the state (Kałuczek 2012; Marczuk 2013c).

3.1.1. Political debate and its key actors

The overall picture of political (and policy) debate concerning poverty and social exclusion, which emerges from the interviews is quite unequivocal. Interviewees representing different political sides and organisations perceive it unanimously as extremely fragmented and lacking fundamental discussions. However, they indicate different detailed aspects of the it as crucial.

Both the representatives of trade unions and opposition parties criticise the government's (and especially the governing Civic Platform) approach towards social policy. They explain it as the logic of *giving fishing rod instead of a fish* (07). This means, that all efforts should be invested in improvement of the labour market situation and skills development, not in financial transfers. Meanwhile, not everyone is capable of using *such a fishing rod* – especially if their basic needs are not secured. The long not valorised poverty thresholds (income criteria for allowances) are given as one of the most important examples of such approach.

Poverty thresholds for one and multiple person households, which indicate incomes entitling to temporary allowance, are to be revised every three years (see section 2.4.1.1.). They are negotiated during the meetings of the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Issues (TCSEI) with reference to the subsistence minimum. In 2010 (previous valorisation was in 2006) all sides of the social dialogue agreed to raise the thresholds, since it dropped below the subsistence minimum – and a due resolution was issued and signed by the Minister of Labour and the Deputy Prime Minister (both from the coalition Polish People's Party). However, its implementation was blocked by the Minister of Finance (from the governing party) forcing the policy of austerity:

“Have you heard how rough it was in the Tripartite Commission with those income thresholds? We fought, because we had this opportunity (...). There is this regulation that when the thresholds drop below the subsistence minimum Tripartite Commission may ask the Council of Ministers for correction. And we issued this famous resolution number 37 [concerning the increase of thresholds] and Deputy Prime Minister Pawlak signed it, Minister of Labour Fedak signed it and Rostowski [the Minister of Finance] rejected it insolently.”
(012).

The Minister of Finance is identified by some of the interlocutors as the main impediment to implementation of widely understood social policy. Another of his decisions– to freeze 7 billion PLN from the Labour Fund – is often indicated as an example of his disregard to social policy. It was officially justified by the need to rationalise its spending, but according to many voices the aim was also to reduce the budgetary deficit and thus bring Poland closer to fulfilling the Maastricht criteria. As one of the interviewees notices, nothing has been done

so far to improve the system of distribution of this resources and the unemployment is rising²⁰:

This 7 billion, which is frozen, and the Prime Minister promised to use them better. I remember 1.5 years ago the Prime Minister said – I think it was his expose – that too much went to trainings. That this policy has to be changed, because some people are trained 10 times. And what – nothing happens. (...). I'm surprised, because we have only two funds with no deficit and one of them is the Labour Fund. During the crisis this allocations will be smaller, but it still is in good shape. And we could make good use of this money now when we need them” (014).

The government is believed by trade unions and opposition to have abused the argument of crisis to prevent any additional spending on social policy. According to some voices, the crisis is being used to justify government's decisions in select areas:

“Problem of the economic crisis is sometimes present and sometimes not. I would say that it is a slogan used instrumentally by employers and by the government when they want to justify something.” (01).

Representatives of employers put emphasis on the aspect of motivation to work. They perceive allowances from social assistance (especially temporary allowance) as well as unemployment benefits as demotivating people to seek employment. They link it to the little difference between the amount of those transfers and the amount of minimum wage. This is considered an argument supporting the thesis that social transfers are in general too high in Poland, not that the minimum wage is too low – which is a frequent cause for disputes with the representatives of trade unions during TCSEI's meetings. Above that, employers have expressed a critical view not only about the transfers but also of the ALMP and put pressure on the government to change it:

“This [the Labour Fund] is – in quotation marks – our money, we, employers, put this money there. So we would like it to be effectively spent. This is our contribution and we are monitoring the spending. And this money is to a large extent – especially in rural areas – allocated to unemployment benefits...but also to inclusion of the short and long-term unemployed into the labour market. And we prepared in-depth analyses...yes, I can give it to you...they show how ineffective this system is. That we indeed spend a lot of money – it is billions – to no effect. So we are trying to do something to change this system in the best interest of the economy, the unemployed, the future employees and I hope also us – the employers. And we put pressure on the Ministry of Labour and the Prime Minister so that the [local] PES stopped serving just as places where unemployed are registered and one or two people find employment only because some crazy employer decided to come to this institution with a job offer.”(011).

According to the above, local PES are failing in their role of mediators between the unemployed and the employers, which is a view expressed by most of the interviewed. However, what strikes in this statement, is the sense of influence and ownership of the money

²⁰ Poland is currently beginning to feel the consequence of the economic crisis, which is reflected in unemployment statistics.

in the Labour Fund. The government is indeed planning a large reform of the system of labour market institutions, which aims at more individualised job agency (partly based on the private entities), more active search for job offers from the side of local PES and their closer cooperation with employers. It is, however, difficult to determine to what extent the employers influenced it.

Family policy was indicated as the only subject connected to AI, eliciting broader public debate – engaging the media as well as different political and social actors and receiving government’s attention. During the previous term of office of the government, the need to increase the number of crèches and kindergartens was acknowledged as one of the keys to support women’s integration with the labour market (especially that their employment rates are lower than in case of men). Yet, other forms of support did not follow: similarly as in the case of poverty thresholds, the government was reluctant to valorise the threshold for family benefits – also using the argument of the crisis. The situation changed only recently, when the negative demographic prognoses – the drastic decrease of fertility rate and aging of the society – have been more directly emphasised by the government. As one of the respondents notices, the first sign of it was the last year’s pensions reform increasing the retirement age:

“I think that this issue [family policy] has been always present, but the pension reform from last year – extending the age of retirement – where one of the arguments was that people live longer and it’s a matter of capacity of the Social Insurance Fund since the number of births is dropping. I think that this aspect strengthened the importance of family policy. (...). I think that this demography and aging of society triggered those discussions about the necessity to take actions in favour of the family and demography.” (08).

Indeed, the thresholds were raised in October 2012 and family policy was also one of the key subjects of the Prime Minister’s expose after Civic Platform had won the second elections in a row:

“We want to focus on the safety of family and we know very well – I will later present concrete proposals – that we have to break with this partial and ineffective actions. This is the only area for which I feel entitled to use the word “revolution”, but such revolution in favour of fertility, in favour of mother’s safety– who decides with a father to give birth – such revolution is needed in Poland.” (Tusk 2013)

Despite the presence of family policy in government’s agenda, the representatives of opposition parties as well as trade unions perceive this plans as too narrow. They also indicate the ruling parties’ (especially Prime Minister’s) tendency to automatically reject all proposals that do not come from the government’s side.

3.1.2. Influence on the reforms

Most of the interviewees perceive the government as dominant force – as if there was no possibility to influence its decisions. The employers are an exception, as they seem to treat the government as their ally in the fight against the economic crisis. The blame for deficits of labour market policy is placed on the inefficient administration and its employees who yield to the *tyranny of the status quo* (011). Thus the system of motivating employees of public administration should be changed into an outcome-based instead of a rule-base one. At the

same time, there seems to be a sense of influence on the policy, which may be observed on the basis of incoming changes in the system of labour market institutions.

The interviews disclose also the importance of institutionalisation of social dialogue. Thanks to the fact that the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Issues is a legally recognised entity, it is able to put at least some pressure on the government as opposed to non-governmental organisations. NGOs' role is reduced to consulting governmental projects (programmes and legal acts) but without any guarantee to influence their shape, since the remarks and propositions coming from organisations do not have to be taken into consideration. Moreover, the rules regarding the membership in TCSEI are transparent and legally binding. Whereas selection of the NGOs is often based on discretionary criteria – with the exception of network organisations indicated by the European Commission (see BEKS 2011).

3.2. Policy legacies and feedbacks

Several policy legacies shaping changes in the area of AI may be identified. First of all, the lack of discussion concerning the desirable model of social policy over the last 20 years has resulted in a reactive and fragmented approach towards it. From the beginning of systemic transformation it has been treated as a necessary budgetary cost to alleviate the most severe social problems. At first this approach was dictated by the scale of problems and extremely difficult economic situation. However, no attempts have been made over the years to change this “emergency” pattern (see Inglot 2008) into a more preventive and holistic one. Apart from that, the fact, that ministers of finance have had strong positions in most of the democratic governments, made it prone to fiscal austerity regardless to the economic situation.

The accession to the EU has been used to rescale social policy from passive to more active – especially in the field of labour market. In the area of MIP a partly guaranteed minimum income has been introduced together with stronger conditionality, which was to be guaranteed by social contracts. Apart from that significant resources have been invested in activation of the unemployed thanks to the ESF. Some discussion have been initiated in the area of poverty and social exclusion, but their results have not been used to design a coherent model of social policy (see next section).

Second of all, the legacy of a “sectorial” (or even “departmental”) state, which may be track back to the period of state socialism, has not been fully overcome – at the central as well as at the local level – despite many trials. Social policy is shaped by different ministries (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Regional Development, Ministry of Transportation, Construction and Maritime Economy, etc.) and different departments. The cooperation between them is based on commenting strategic programmes, the proposals of legal acts and their amendments or the urgent need to solve a pressing problem, but not necessarily on the joint policy planning. In result, the influence of various arrangements from one area of social policy to another is sometimes overlooked (04, 012). Although the interdepartmental teams are formed more often than it used to be a few years ago, the representatives of central public administration vary in their assessments of the fact. Some of our respondents find it helpful and important (05, 010) others consuming time for real (i.e. important for the department) work (06).

Moreover, the “ownership” of active inclusion as a concept is not shared across departments, but rather treated as a domain of those units, which specialise in poverty and social exclusion. As one of the interviewees from department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy not directly connected to social assistance admits:

Interviewer: “Do you remember any discussions in your department or in the ministry concerning the meaning of active inclusion? How to translate it into Polish conditions?”

Respondent: “Well, I would say this is more a question to the Department of Social Assistance and Social Inclusion. (...). But this active integration – it to be discussed in this department – I haven’t heard...maybe at the ministerial level there was...I saw some pieces of information on the website I think – but I did not participate in anything.” (08).

The limited cooperation of the local PES and local SAO seems to be a side effect of the above. Those institutions face a twofold problem: they belong to policy areas regulated by two different legal acts and operate on various administrative levels (LAU 1 and LAU 2). Despite steps taken to bring them together, their cooperation is still limited to sharing information about specific cases (for details see 4.3.2).

Finally, the legacy of unemployment as a dominant social problem should be mentioned as a factor preventing the inclusion of problems of the working into the policy agenda. Poland has been struggling with mass unemployment from the very beginning of the transformation. Even in years of economic growth the unemployment rate has been oscillating around 10%. On the one hand, the labour market policy has been identified with combating unemployment. On the other hand, the conviction that every work is better than none has long prevailed in the discourse. In result, hardly any instruments are directed to groups such as working poor or other people experiencing vulnerable employment. A good example of the perception of those groups, is the statement of one of the employees of public administration working in the area of labour market policy:

Interviewer: “We are especially interested in three groups: long-term unemployed, single parents and working poor. Could you please compare the policy instrument offered to them?”

Respondent: “Everything is offered to those three groups, right”?

Interviewer: “Also to working poor?”

Respondent: “No, not to working poor, we are not interested in working poor. We are dealing with unemployment here.” (06)

According to the law, PES should be also taking care of employed searching for work, but no one seems to be remembering about this function. Above that, such people may only count on job advisory and job agency, but no forms of up-skilling are offered to them.

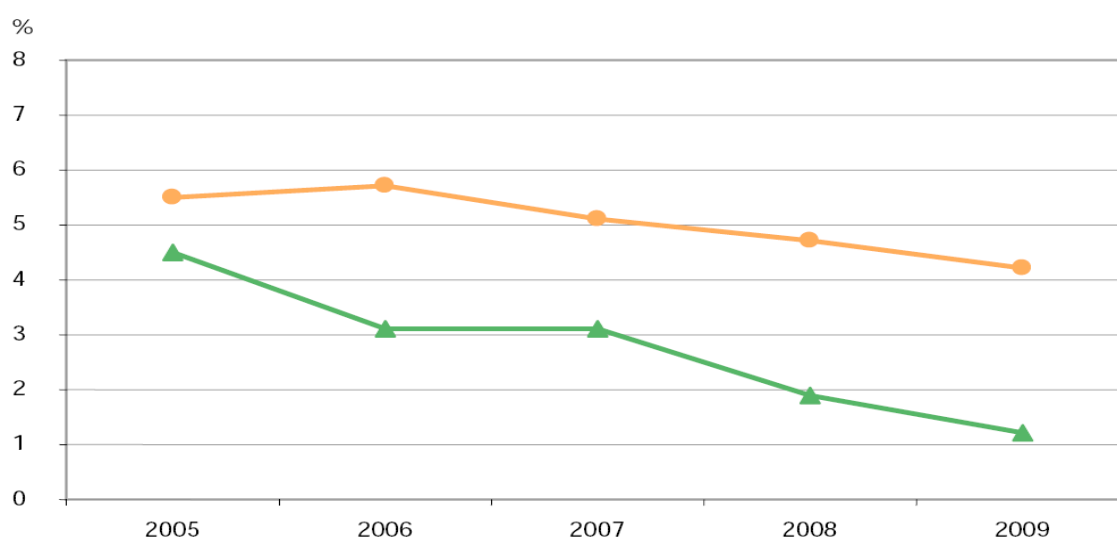
3.3. Institutional constraints and opportunities

The distribution of power and responsibilities among actors engaged in social policy changed in 1999 with the introduction of decentralised administrative structure. The central level retained competences in the areas of policy planning, budget planning and general supervision. Local authorities were given freedom to shape those areas, which were not in the competences of higher administrative levels. The idea was to better adjust social policy (and

other policy areas) to the local circumstances and demands. However, it triggered a cost-avoidance strategy from both sides – the state and the local units, which has been limiting the process of policy planning and implementation.

The share of expenditures on social assistance and other social policy tasks in total expenditures from the central budget has dropped visibly in years 2005-2009 (see Figure 8). The highest amount of money was in those years allocated on family benefits, alimony fund benefits and social security contributions for persons collecting nursing benefits²¹: it equalled 71.4% of state's expenditures on social policy in 2005 and dropped to 65.6% in 2008 and increased again to 68.1% in 2009 (GUS 2011a).

Figure No. 8: Share of expenditures on social assistance and other social policy tasks in total expenditures from the central budget in years 2005-2009 (%).



Note: orange – expenditures on social assistance (expenditures on family benefits; alimony fund benefits; social security contributions; care and educational facilities; social assistance homes; allowances from social assistance, etc.); green – expenditures on other social policy tasks (teams for the adjudication of disability; state funds: The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, The State Fund for Veterans; social pension, etc.).

Source: GUS 2011a.

Whereas, the expenditures of local governments on social assistance and benefits have increased in years 2003-2009. *Gminas* have been the most burdened with social assistance tasks, whereas *poviats* the least.

Gminas have been gaining more tasks over time. The large part of those tasks was financed by the state in a form of earmarked grants. However, those grants were often lower than the actual needs in the areas with the highest fixed costs such as education and social assistance (GUS 2010). This revealed territorial inequalities, since units with higher own incomes²²

²¹ Benefits paid to people resigning from work to take care for a disabled family member. Those people have their social security contributions covered by the state.

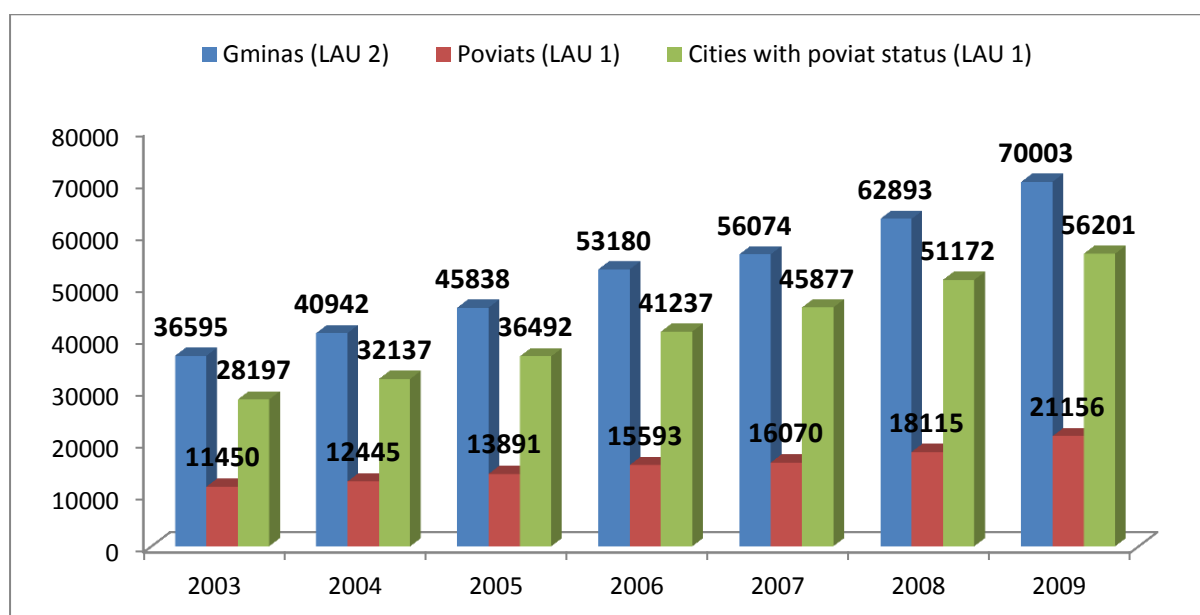
²² *Gminas*' own budgets are based on their share in local PIT and CIT. In 1998 (before the territorial reform) it was 18% and 4% respectively, in years 1999-2003 27.6% and 5%, whereas from 2004 39.34% and 6.71%.

were able to better secure the needs of their citizens by supplementing more generously transfers from the state (Herbst, Herczyński, Levits 2009; Zalewski 2005). Eventually, the possibility to contribute to the guaranteed part of temporary allowance proved to be a rarely used instrument of local social policy (for details see 4.1) available mostly to the richest *gminas* (010). As one of our interlocutors emphasises – *gminas* became so afraid of growing cost, that they hardly developed the ability to look at social policy as an investment, which would bring returns in the future:

“(...) as we know, local governments are now oversensitive as far as new tasks are concerned. They find it hard to look at activities as something which is costly, but – if everyone makes an effort – it will bring returns for the gmina in the overall settlement.” (015).

Meanwhile, *poviats* were given an ambivalent role in labour market policy by the reform. On the one hand, they became the administrative level at which local PES (for details see section 3.2.1) – responsible for local employment policy – operate. On the other, the financing of the latter as well as the legal framework in which they function was still in the hands of the central government. Therefore, *poviats* had, in fact, limited competences in shaping labour market policy. They could create special programmes addressed to employers or chosen groups of the unemployed from their own resources – but those were rather low²³ (Matela, Piotrowski, Starega-Piasek, Wóycicka 2006).

Figure No. 9: Local governments' expenditures on social assistance and benefits in years 2003-2009 in millions PLN.



Note: Main expenditures of local units: 1) *gminas*: family benefits, alimony fund benefits, social security contributions for various types of beneficiaries, social assistance offices, social assistance allowances, housing benefits; 2) *poviats*: care and educational facilities, social assistance homes, foster families; 3) cities with *poviat* status: family benefits, alimony fund benefits, social security contributions for various types of beneficiaries, social assistance offices, social assistance allowances, social assistance homes.

Source: GUS 2010.

²³ Unlike *gminas* their own incomes from 2004 equalled only 10.25 % of PIT and 1.4% of CIT

The dynamics of relations between the central and the local seems to be impeding implementation of AI reforms and changes in social policy in general. No effective model of cooperation between those levels has been developed over the years, which would allow joint shaping of the policy. As some of our interlocutors suggest the Joint Commission of the Government and the Local Governments – the main body, where those sides meet – is used to discuss detailed legal arrangements not overall policy concepts. Above that a similar patterns are being reproduced: local governments often concentrate on local – and thus particular matters; they also express their fears of being burdened with new costs and, if the pressure from their side is sufficient, particular instruments are included in legal acts as only optional. Innovations are sometimes introduced in legal acts just as a possibility – and some of them are later changed into obligations.

3.4. The EU's influence on national-level policy development

Concepts developed or promoted at the EU level, such as “active inclusion” or “flexicurity” do not seem to trigger any actual public or political debate (none of our interlocutors even referred to it if not asked) and are used as slogans, rather than actual building blocks of social policy. Yet, EU's influence on national social policy should not be entirely disregarded, because of relatively short presence of Poland in the EU and the significant amount of money transferred from its funds.

3.4.1. Influence of the EU accession

Although social policy was not the area of strong pressure on the harmonisation of law in the pre-accession period, some influence on national-level policy development might have been identified. The then Minister of Economy and Labour – Jerzy Hausner²⁴ – used the perspective of future implementation of the open method of coordination (OMC) as an occasion for broader discussion on poverty and social inclusion. National Social Inclusion Strategy 2004-2010 (NSIS)²⁵ – a strategic document – was prepared in 2003, engaging broad scope of experts. Working groups consisting of officials from central administration and local governments, experts in the field of social policy and statistics and third sector partners were established. They developed various expert evaluations, which became the foundation for indicating NSIS priorities to be realised until 2010. Except for dealing with definitional issues (how to understand social exclusion, social cohesion and poverty) the strategy referred to issues such as changes in family structure (especially situation of numerous families and single parents), groups at greatest risk of poverty, educational inequalities (especially access to preschool).

The more general function of NSIS was “Poland's joining in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy as regards the modernisation of the European Social Model”²⁶ (Hausner 2007). The strategy was at first used as a reference point in the monitoring of National Strategy Reports (NSR) prepared in the framework of the “Social” OMC. But after some time it lost its impact and at the end no evaluation or assessment of its realisation was prepared. According to Golinowska (2008: 124-125), the new right-wing government led by Law and

²⁴ Jerzy Hausner represented a left-wing party – Democratic Left Alliance.

²⁵ Unlike Joint Inclusion Memorandum and National Action Plan for Social Inclusion it was a non-obligatory document prepared in the framework of Social Agenda 2000.

²⁶ According to the then minister of economy, labour and social policy from the Democratic Left Alliance Jerzy Hausner, who initiated the works on NSIS.

Justice changed priorities of social policy (in National Development Plan 2003-2007) putting support of people in post-productive age and vocational integration of migrants first. The next, more liberal, government of Civic Platform did not come back to it at all. The interviews confirm that the strategy lost its importance and is currently perceived by representatives of public administration as one of the many which occurred in the past. However, some of the respondents representing the social side express regret, that it “faded away”.

Years 2003-2004 were also crucial because of the reforms from the area of social policy, and labour market policy (see 2.1.2). However, EU accession’s influence on their construction is not direct. It may be classified more as a window of opportunity used to make changes in favour of active instruments, considering that Poland could count on significant support from the ESF. Large investments in human capital were made thanks to those resources – especially in the form of trainings for the unemployed and activation programmes for the socially excluded. Yet, doubts have been raised whether the money was effectively spent.

Another important issue, which was to some extent influenced by the accession, was the guaranteed minimum income (GMI) (Staręga-Piasek, Wóycicka 2009; Szarfenberg 2009). The first plans to introduce it date back to the beginning of the 1990s but were subsequently dropped. The subject came back in 1998 – in the context of the National Programme of Preparation for the EU Membership in which implementation of the 92/441/EEC directive (on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems) was considered. The idea to establish GMI was soon rejected attributing the decision to insufficient budgetary resources (see Szarfenberg 2009: 9). At the end, quasi GMI²⁷ was introduced with other legal changes in 2004. Some of the experts emphasise the role of EU accession and the “Social” OMC as stimuli to do that (Staręga-Piasek, Wóycicka 2009).

3.4.2. Post-accession period

The initial mobilisation of the policy makers, experts and representatives of third sector to prepare for the implementation of the OMC could be observed also on the example of the first National Strategy Report (2004-2006), which had been prepared nearly simultaneously to the already mentioned National Strategy for Social Inclusion 2004-2010. However, the further this process went, the less political significance it had (see Wóycicka, Zieleńska 2009).

Introduction of the OMC had some influence on the distribution of power among national actors. Despite the decreasing political importance of the OMC, the inclusion of various partners (experts, third sector partners) became permanent at the national level – which was an improvement in comparison to the previous years. Every time a National Strategy Report was prepared, they were at least invited for consultation. But – what should be emphasised – their influence on the National Strategy Reports’ content was limited to the possibility of giving remarks. Whether their point of view was included in the document was up to officials from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Apart from that, they were not taking part in the process of monitoring of its implementation (Wóycicka, Zieleńska 2009).

The employees of public administration point out the gradual and indirect positive influence of the OMC (and other EU policies) on the learning process. It means that some reservoir of

²⁷ Only 50% of the amount is guaranteed and criteria other than financial play a role.

knowledge about different systemic arrangements has been gathered as well as inspiration has been taken from another counties in the area of policy planning:

There is no direct translation, but there are two ways. Some knowledge base is cumulated and may be always used. When some programmes or strategies are being prepared... when someone has been participating in some form of sharing knowledge or OMC – I have seen it numerous times that some things were included in those documents. (...). And we are facing a huge change in employment policy (...). I will be a deep systemic change. And (...) most of the principal elements of it were seen elsewhere. (05).

The new social agenda connected to Europe 2020 strategy has so far had an ambiguous impact on the social sphere. On the one hand, the fact that reduction of poverty became one of its goals influenced the content of National Reform Programme and its actualisations. In result, combating poverty became a target linked to the economic development. Therefore, strengthening of its position in comparison to the framework of the Lisbon Strategy and against the background of other policies may be assumed. On the other hand, the social dimension is addressed very narrowly in comparison to National Strategy Reports. Whereas National Social Report does not play a role of a broader goal-setting strategy, what seems to be disappointing especially for the respondents representing NGOs.

4. The National Policy Framework for Active Inclusion

4.1. The structure of minimum income rights

After the EU accession legal changes have been focused on modifying the already introduced arrangements and no paradigm alterations have occurred. The details will be discussed below. The most important direction of changes seems to be the increasing awareness of the key role of childcare in the activation of women, even though the designed instruments are not entirely functional.

Despite the introduction of the so called guaranteed part of the minimum income (for details see next paragraph), its recognition as a social right – especially among social workers – is low. The growing number of MIP claimants aware of their rights is noticed in social assistance – which is not appreciated. Those, who make claims for MIP transfers using the legal right to appeal, are classified as abusing the system. People who subdue to the decisions of social service are appreciated as “good clients”. Such approach is definitely connected to a wide range of MIP claimants, who are collecting financial support for years – and no activation measures work in their cases.

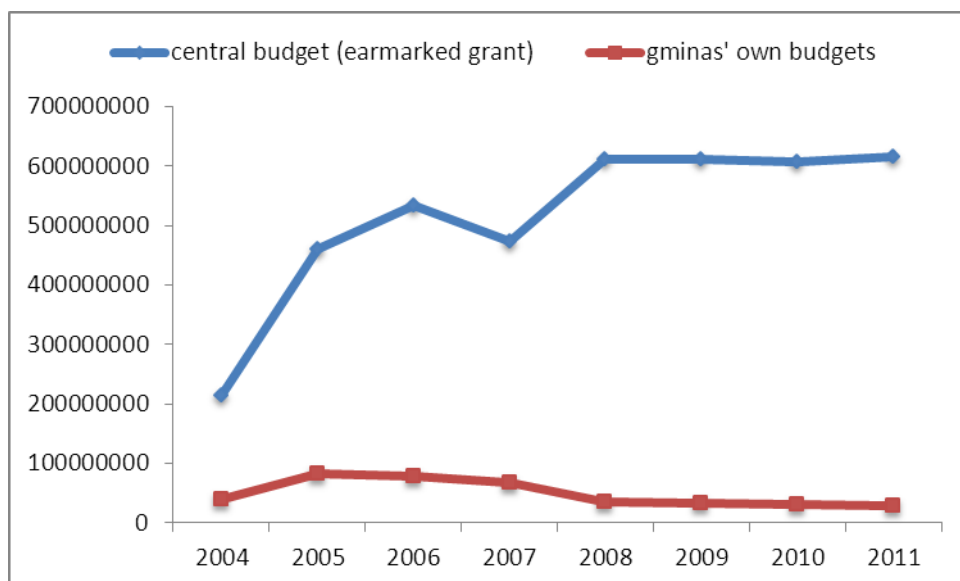
Finally, it is important to mention, that there are reform plans in the area of labour market policy and social assistance. In the first case, a change towards more market-based and individualised system of activation and job agency, with more emphasis put on the cooperation with the employers is to be introduced. In the second case, more conditionality instruments for social assistance are to be designed and more space for contracting out is to be given. The latter elicits concerns of the NGOs: they express doubts whether quality of services is to be treated as the main criterion of selection, instead of a price – as it is now. Moreover, there are also plans to change the system of setting the income criterion for MIP into a yearly and based on inflation. However, it is still to be based on the subsistence minimum, not the social minimum. Both reforms are in line with the government’s approach to social policy – to make it more adjusted to the labour market demand and to give more incentives to MIP clients to seek employment. The agenda for their implementation is not yet known.

4.1.1. Institutionalisation

MIP consists of two basic types of benefits²⁸ – temporary allowance and earmarked allowance. Temporary allowance is a means-tested basic income support for people in economically productive age. From 2004 part of it is guaranteed by the state provided that a person fulfils income criterion and an additional criterion such as unemployment, homelessness, disability, etc., entitling to benefits (see the list in the next section). It is financed from the central budget to the level of 50% of an income gap: the money is transferred to the local level (*gmina*) in the form of earmarked grant and paid by local SAO. Local governments may decide to supplement it from their own resources – but the opportunity is rarely used (see Figure 10).

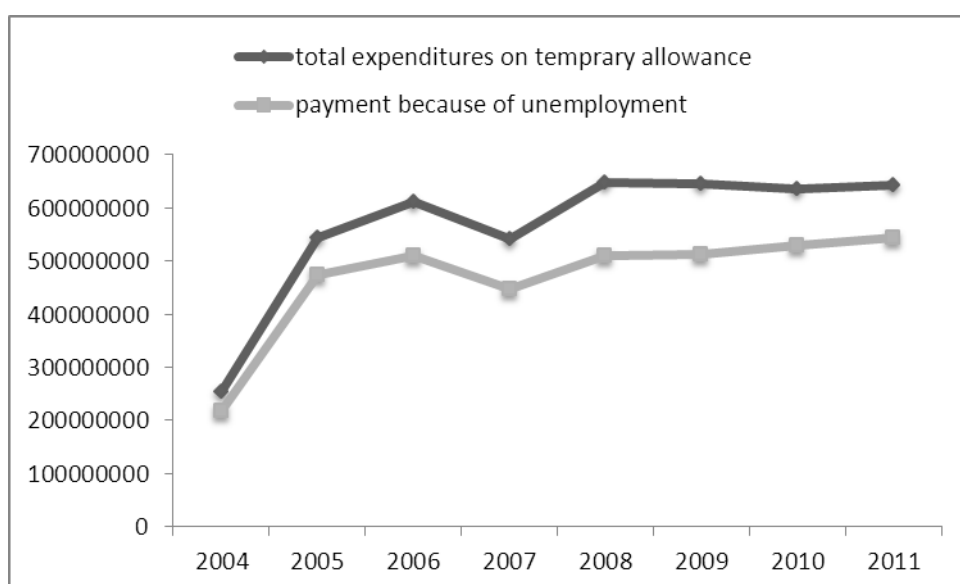
²⁸ There is also a third type of benefit, which is to some extent connected to MIP – a permanent allowance. It is an obligatory benefit paid to people unable to work due to age or disability, whose incomes are below the legal criterion. It will not be discussed in the report, because it is beyond the scope of this study.

Figure No. 10: State's and *gminas'* expenditures on temporary allowance in years 2004-2011



Source: Own calculations on the basis of MPiPS 03 reports (part 2B).

Figure No. 11: Total expenditures on temporary allowance and expenditures on temporary allowance with unemployment as an additional criterion



Source: Own calculations on the basis of MPiPS 03 reports (part 2B).

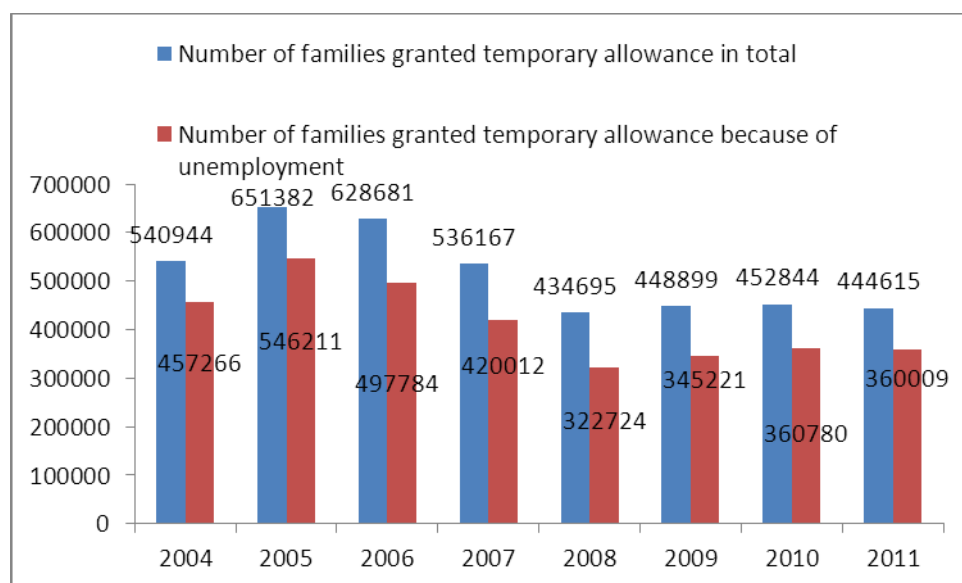
The high increase of state's expenditures between 2004 and 2005 was most probably connected to two factors: on the one hand, the new law was introduced in 2004 obligating the state to cover temporary allowances to the level of 20% and 15% of an income gap of – respectively – one-person and multi-person household, but it was in force only from the beginning of May (i.e. only 7 months of that year). On the other, the guaranteed level was higher in 2005 (30% and 20% respectively). Similarly, the guaranteed level was increased in years 2006-2007 to 35% and 25% respectively. Whereas the decrease in years 2006-2007 (when the guaranteed level was the same) was probably the effect of a visible decrease in unemployment levels, since unemployment was the most common reason (additional to income) for which temporary allowances were guaranteed (see Figure 11). The increase of

states' expenditures and the decrease of *gminas'* expenditures from their own budgets beginning in 2007 was probably a result of increasing the amount of temporary allowance guaranteed by the state to 50% of income for all households.

The respondents expressed doubts whether temporary allowance should be considered a guaranteed minimum income. Two arguments were put forward. First of all, more than just an income criterion must be met if a person is to receive it – and some criteria are discretionary, i.e. the decision is reserved to a social worker (04, 07, 010). Thus, the right seems not so obvious. Second of all, the guaranteed amount of it is so low, that it may hardly be classified as an actual income support (04).

The number of families collecting temporary allowances decreased in years 2004-2011, with a peak in 2005. The main reason for that was the improved economic situation – unemployment rate dropped from 17.6% in 2005 to 9.5% in 2008. The gradual increase in number of families collecting temporary allowance in years 2009-2010 was simultaneous with the increase of unemployment rate to 12.1% in 2009 and 12.4% in 2010²⁹. However, the relatively slow rise in number of such families and a slow decrease between 2010 and 2011 is most probably connected to the constant (not changed for six years) low income threshold, which dropped in 2011 below the subsistence minimum.

Figure No. 12: Number of families receiving temporary allowance in total and because of unemployment (as a second criterion) in years 2004-2011



Source: Own calculations on the basis of MPiPS 03 reports.

Earmarked allowance is a cash or in-kind benefit, which may but does not have to be granted to a person or a family for a certain purpose. It has to be motivated by the existential need (food, medicine, medical treatment, heating, etc.) or the need to support the self-sufficiency (finance the cost of commuting to work, etc.). It may be used to enable a realisation of a social contract. Earmarked allowances are financed by local governments and thus depend on their financial situation and policy priorities.

²⁹ Data from the Central Statistical Office: http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_677_PLK_HTML.htm

According to the law, from 2004 the income criterion for allowances is to be valorised every three years. However, in 2009 the government decided not to increase it because of the economic crisis. In result, the legal poverty threshold dropped below the subsistence minimum, which limited the number of people eligible for social assistance benefits (GUS 2011b).

4.1.2. Benefit structure and generosity

Temporary allowance

Eligibility criteria

People and families are formally eligible for temporary allowance if they fulfil income criterion and at least one additional criterion from those defined by law³⁰:

- unemployment,
- orphanage,
- homelessness,
- disability,
- chronic illness,
- domestic violence,
- human trafficking,
- need for the protection of maternity (and numerous families),
- helplessness in the performance of up-bringing functions and in running a household (especially in case of single-parent or numerous families),
- problems of young people leaving childcare facilities with adjustment to everyday life requirements,
- need for inclusion of foreigners with refugee status or with right to supplementary protection (*ochrona uzupełniająca*)³¹,
- adjustment problems after leaving prison, alcoholism and drug addiction,
- random incident or crisis situation, natural or ecological disaster.

However, only in four of those cases payment is – in practice – obligatory: if someone is unemployed, chronically ill, disabled or awaiting an administrative decision about some other type of benefit (Wóycicka 2009; Szarfenberg 2009). It is probably connected to the fact that those particular situations have administrative confirmation (from local PES, health care services, commission certifying disability, or public administration). In other cases the decision is left to the discretion of social services as it is based on social interview performed by a social worker.

Amount

The amount of temporary allowance is computed on the basis of the difference between the income criterion for single or multi-person household and the income of an actual person or family. Income criterion from October 2012 equals 546 PLN for one person household and 456 PLN for multi-person household (see Table 17).

The guaranteed minimum payment in 2012 equals 50% of individual income gap, but no less than 20 PLN and no more than 418 PLN – unless the local government decides to supplement

³⁰ The act on social assistance from 2004.

³¹ It is granted to those people who were refused the refugee status, but coming back to their country of origin could result in putting them in danger.

it from its own budget, which is hardly the case. The maximum transfer per person is, thus, approximately seven times lower than the average wage and three times lower than the minimum wage. In result, the larger family is and the lower income it has, the more significant MIP becomes. For example four-persons family with no income, may potentially be better off on temporary allowance than one-earner four-persons family on minimum wage (see 3.1 and 3.2 – discussions over minimum pay and motivation to work).

Table No. 17: Income criteria in the period of 2004-2012.

Year in which defined	One person household in PLN	More than one person in a household in PLN
2004	461	316
2006	477	351
2009	477	351
2012 (1 st of October)	546	456

Sources: Act on social assistance form 2004; Regulation concerning verification of income criteria and cash benefits from social assistance from 2006, 2009 and 2012.

Manner and frequency with which benefit(s) is/are paid

Temporary allowance is paid monthly, in cash³². The local SAO determines a period for which it is granted on the basis of own evaluation of a particular situation. This makes the process discretionary and dependent on the policy of this institution or/and local authorities. As shown by the recent quantitative research conducted among social workers (Rymsza 2011), over 60% of those employed in local SAOs agree that the period for which the benefits are granted should be limited to the time necessary to up-date or up-grade vocational skills – which reveals strong up-skilling approach.

Earmarked allowance

Eligibility criteria

In general, the same eligibility criteria apply to earmarked allowance and to temporary allowance – a person or a family cannot exceed the same income criterion. However, there is also a possibility to grant an earmarked allowance to a person or a family which exceeds the income criterion. If it is due to the disaster which results in losing possession it will not have to be paid back; and if it is a result of temporally difficult situation it may be granted under the condition of paying it back. Moreover, in case of more global natural disasters such as floods, earmarked allowances are paid by the government and may be relatively high (even 20 000 – 30 000 PLN per family).

Amount

The amount depends on the situation. The minimum and maximum payment or value is not set. Since the costs are – in most cases – covered by local authorities from the lowest administrative unit (gmina) it depends on its own income and the approach to social policy.

Manner and frequency with which benefit(s) is/are paid

³² It is unclear whether it may be transferred into bank accounts.

The manner and the frequency in which the benefits are paid are not regulated. There are probably different institutional practices concerning that.

Family benefits

As already mentioned, families with low income (closer to social than subsistence minimum) may count also on receiving family allowance (2.3). It is granted to all families fulfilling the due income criterion (no matter whether they are working, unemployed, MIP clients). The income threshold was increased in November 2012 – from 504 to 539 PLN for regular families and from 583 PLN to 623 PLN for families with the disable child. Whereas from November 2014 it is projected at the level of 574 PLN and 664 PLN respectively.

Families receiving temporary allowance from social assistance are in general entitled to family allowance, since the income criterion in this case is higher than the poverty threshold. However, in some cases receiving family allowance may result in exceeding the income criterion for temporary allowance³³.

Family allowances are paid for each child below 18 (or below 24 if he/she continues education). The amounts vary with age and number of children and are higher in case of disabled children.

Box 4: Family benefits

Family allowances:

- 77 PLN for a child under 5
- 106 PLN for a child between 5 and 18
- 115 PLN for a child between 18-24

There are also various kinds of benefits available to families **entitled to family allowance** (i.e. fulfilling the income criterion):

- Childcare leave benefit (400 PLN): supplement to family allowance paid during childcare leave (an unpaid leave which may be taken after parental leave) in most of the cases for maximum 24 months.
- Single-parenting benefit (170 PLN or maximum 340 for all children)
- Numerous families benefit (80 PLN for third child and next children)
- School benefit: paid at the beginning of a school year (100 PLN per child)

Source: <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/wsparcie-dla-rodzin-z-dziecmi/swiadczenia-rodzinne/>

The fact that the thresholds for family benefits have not been valorised for 8 year resulted in immense reduction in number of families eligible for support. As emphasised in the interviews – the time of economic growth was not used to rise the financial support:

³³ For example one earner family with net income of 1700 PLN consisting of two adults and two children (under 5 and between 5 and 18) would be entitled to temporary allowance and family allowance. Yet, after receiving family allowance it would lose the entitlement to temporary allowance, because of too high income. It is important to emphasise that this would in practice mean losing approx. 60 PLN (15 per head), which is less than family allowance for child under 5 (see box 4).

This period 2007-2008-2009 was good for the economy. The wage went up. But income criteria did not go up. And the number of families eligible dropped from approximately 5 million to approximately 2.5-2.6 million.(08).

Thus, the government's approach towards support for low income families was similar to this concerning social assistance support – in this case also the argument of the incoming crisis was used.

Housing benefits

Housing benefits are means-tested benefits covering partly the costs of housing. They are granted to persons and families below a certain income criterion (higher than the poverty threshold): not more than 175% of the lowest pension for a single-person household and not more than 125% of the lowest pension per head for the multi-person household³⁴. It is paid provided that the floorage of the flat/house does not exceed the norm defined by law. The level of allowance equals the difference between real costs of flat of certain surface and 10-15% family income (depending on income per person). The temporary and earmarked allowances from social assistance (for explanation see section 3.1.1) do not count as income when housing benefits are decided. From 2005 they are financed by local units.

4.1.3. Benefit administration

Temporary and earmarked allowances are administered by local SAOs, which operate at the level of *gmina* (LAU 2)³⁵. Every claimant is assigned to a case worker, who is responsible for both – social work and assessment of eligibility for allowances on the basis of social interview, but not always for making ultimate decision (sometimes other employees are responsible for that). As mentioned above, the process is to some extent discretionary. First of all, the procedure of counting income of a person or a family is not entirely transparent. Generally, it comes down to the net payments received in the previous month (income minus PIT, health insurance and social insurance) – reduced also by maintenance paid for someone, if this is the case. Except from financial transfers and savings also financial situation in general (e.g. valuable things and real estate) is assessed by a social worker – if he or she decides that a person or a family may overcome their difficulties on their own thanks to their resources, allowances may be denied to them. This provision is aimed at counteracting cases in which people have unregistered incomes (e.g. from illegal work) and decide to apply for allowances. However, it generates the risk of unequal and unjust treatment, which may be difficult to act against because of lack of clear regulations. Second of all, some of the additional criteria for allowances (see above) also leave space for arbitrary decisions. Opinions of our respondents were divided in this case. On the one hand, especially those representing public administration emphasised that the criteria are broad enough to include every person fulfilling income criterion (03, 010). On the other hand, some of the respondents considered it a field for manipulation: it gives authorities the opportunity to reduce number of claimants (04, 07). Recommendations from the side of some politicians and social partners to abolish the additional criteria have not been accepted so far. This may suggest the intention to leave the “contingency plan” in case of too high number of claims.

³⁴ The lowest pension in 2012 equals 799.18 PLN.

³⁵ Other benefits are also administered by *gminas*, however, the organisational arrangements differ. Sometimes all tasks are appointed to local social assistance offices.

Claimants have the possibility to appeal to the local government boards of appeal, if allowances are not granted to them. According to a recent qualitative study of social workers³⁶ (Dudkiewicz 2011), this possibility has been used more often in recent years – which indicates increasing awareness of social rights among clients. Social workers link it to their changing profile – there are more often well-educated unemployed who lost good jobs. What is striking, those clients who appeal are not evaluated positively – they are classified as abusing the system. The worst group are those who do not want to agree to conditionality (signing a social contract) and appeal – those are characterised as “crafty fellows”. The most appreciated are the so called “silent clients”: modest, taking help with gratitude – which is often the case with elderly and disabled people.

Case of long term unemployed

Unemployment is one of the reasons for granting temporary allowance to the guaranteed level. LTU will probably fulfil also the income criterion, because they do not have the right to unemployment benefit. However, if they live in a multi-person household, which has higher incomes per capita than the income criterion, they will not be eligible for temporary allowance.

Case of single parents

SP are more prone to the discretionary decisions of social assistance. Even if they fulfil the income criterion, there still has to be a second reason for granting the benefit. Therefore, they would have to be classified either as helpless in the performance of up-bringing functions or in need of protection due to parenthood³⁷ - which is indicated by law as the main reason why allowances may be granted to SP – or some other reason from the mentioned above would have to be acknowledged. That matter is settled by a social worker on the basis of social interview. In addition, SP may count on a single-parenting benefit if they fulfil income criterion for family allowance.

Case of working poor

WP are in the most disadvantaged situation. Even though they may fulfil the income criterion, the second reason for granting the allowance is not so obvious and depends on the situation of particular person or family and the evaluation of social worker.

4.2. The activation of minimum income claimants

4.2.1. Personalisation

The main issues regarding personalisation are connected to the so-called “caseload” (i.e. number of cases processed by one social worker). In the middle of 2000s a legally binding standard was introduced indicating that the proportion of 1 social worker per 2000 inhabitants of *gminas* should be kept³⁸. On the turn of the new decade this proportion was supplemented with another one, namely 1 social worker should supervise no more than 50 cases of families³⁹. It was probably connected to the fact that in some localities even if the first proportion was retained, the number of families “processed” by one social worker was

³⁶ 6 Focus group interviews were conducted with lower and middle rank employees of local social assistance offices.

³⁷ It is striking that the Act on social assistance defines it as need of protection of maternity, which reflects traditional vision of family depicted there. However, we may assume that also single father will be taken into account, but this has to be verified during the interviews.

³⁸ According to the Act on social assistance from 2004.

³⁹ According to the amendment to the Act on social assistance from 2011 it is to be realised until 2015.

considered too high. The official statistics prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy on the basis of reports from local SAO and *powiat* family assistance centres do not include information concerning the fulfilment of those standards. However, it is possible to follow it through on the regional level.

Proportions are not always fulfilled at the regional scale (see Table 18), with visible discrepancies among regions (although, the situation may be diversified at the local level). The largest number of inhabitants per social worker from local SAO is in Wielkopolskie - 2622 and the lowest in Warmińsko-Mazurskie – 1662. In the former there is also the second largest number of social worker missing to fulfil the standard (405) and it is outdistanced only by Mazowieckie with 455 social workers needed. Another indicator – which reflects the actual caseload more precisely – is the number of families per social worker. Again, Wielkopolskie is in the worst situation (105 families), whereas only Śląskie is close to the standard.

Table No. 18: Number of inhabitants and families per 1 social worker from local social assistance office in 2010.

Regions (NUTS II)	Number of inhabitants per one social worker	Required number of social workers in local social assistance offices	How many social workers are missing to fulfil the standard?	Number of families per 1 social worker
Dolnośląskie	2108	1439	74	61
Kujawsko pomorskie	1895	1035		87
Lubelskie	1 701	1 076		58
Lubuskie	2 115	506	28	98
Łódzkie	2 015	1 267	9	73
Małopolskie	2 018	1 655	15	60
Mazowieckie	2 421	2 621	455	75
Opolskie	2 491	514	101	82
Podkarpackie	1 905	1 052		78
Podlaskie	1 958	594		73
Pomorskie	2 082	1 120	44	74
Śląskie	1 926	2 318		51
Świętokrzyskie	1 793	633		78
Warmińsko-mazurskie	1 662	714		87
Wielkopolskie	2 622	1 710	406	105
Zachodniopomorskie	1 826	847		73

Source: Hryniewicka 2010, p. 32.

Table No. 19: Number of unemployed per local PES officer in 2011.

Regions (NUTS II)	Number of unemployed/unemployment rate	Number of unemployed per one employee of local PES	Number of unemployed per one job agent	Number of unemployed per one job advisor
Poland	1 982 676 (12.5%)	98	547	1 238
Dolnośląskie	143 575 (12.5%)	85	449	1 088
Kujawsko-pomorskie	139 622 (16.9%)	112	618	1 183
Lubelskie	122 441 (13.3%)	103	517	1 212
Lubuskie	59 134 (15.4%)	89	414	1 207
Łódzkie	138 652 (12.7%)	90	504	1 146
Małopolskie	145 094 (10.5%)	102	567	1 307
Mazowieckie	246 739 (9.9%)	117	724	1 486
Opolskie	48 029 (13.3%)	87	480	1 232
Podkarpackie	146 208 (15.7%)	114	735	1 700
Podlaskie	65 920 (14.1%)	106	610	1 373
Pomorskie	106 667 (12.4%)	97	544	1 285
Śląskie	186 187 (10.1%)	84	474	1 029
Świętokrzyskie	83 217 (15.3%)	91	452	1 125
Warmińsko-mazurskie	107 333 (20.1%)	105	574	1 376
Wielkopolskie	134 954 (9.2%)	87	505	1 080
Zachodniopomorskie	108 904 (17.5%)	108	570	1 224

Source: MPiPS 2012a, 2012b.

Personalisation may also be assessed on the basis of perceptions and opinions of employees of local SAO⁴⁰. According to the quantitative research conducted in years 2009-2010 on the population of 677 employees and 164 directors of the local social assistance offices⁴¹ excessive caseload is not the biggest problem in this area: 49% of employees indicated that it is as it should be, and 33.8% stated that they are overburdened. There was also a significant number of employees having no opinion on that subject – 14.6%. However, lack of space in the offices to guarantee privacy to the beneficiaries was considered the more severe obstacle in every day's work. A separate room to conduct talks and interviews is available only to 15.7% of the employees and 54.1% have at disposal only their own rooms where they have co-workers. 40.9% from the latter group indicate they cannot guarantee the beneficiaries a secure situation in which a good relation could be established.

The situation of local PES in terms of caseload is even worse with 98 unemployed per PES officer, 547 per job agent and 1238 per job advisor on average (see Table 19). There are also visible discrepancies between regions in this respect. There is no clear pattern behind that: regions with higher and lower unemployment levels are among those with the highest caseload. Though the lowest caseload may be found mostly among those with the lowest levels of unemployment (with the exception of Lubuskie and Świętokrzyskie).

Local PES have the possibility to prepare individual action plans for unemployed persons. It is obligatory for five groups: people under 25, over 50, without qualifications, without experience and ex-convicts who did not take up work. In other cases it is only optional – no priority is given here to minimum income claimants (although some of them may belong to the mentioned groups). However, considering the fact, that caseload of job advisors and job agents is very high it seems doubtful whether they have time to do much more than what they are obliged to.

Finally, reform plans should be mentioned here. According to our interviewees (06), there is an idea to introduce profiling of clients. Three general categories of clients will be created – people active on the labour market (temporarily unemployed), people needing support in job seeking, and people distant from the labour market (long-term unemployed). More individualised approach is to be offered (better diagnosis of the case) and better targeting of support – different range of instruments is to be offered to those groups. It is to be achieved thanks to outsourcing part of these tasks to private job agencies. However, no details are yet known about how this is to be realised⁴².

4.2.2. Conditionality

Social contract is the main instrument of conditionality, which local social assistance offices have at their disposal. The rules regarding its signature are not sharp. Every time the act on social assistance mentions it, word "may" is used: social worker "may sign" a social contract with a person or a family" or social contract "may be used" as a part of social work to reinforce the activation process. The only specific case mentioned by law concerns unemployed people directed by local PES to sign a social contract (for details see section 4.3.2.).

⁴⁰ There is no research available in which the voice of beneficiaries would be included.

⁴¹ Olech A., Sobczak, K. Jakość i organizacja pracy w ośrodkach pomocy. Research conducted by the Institute for the development of Social Services.

⁴² No official documents have been published yet and our interlocutors were reluctant to reveal the details.

In practice, the ways in which the contracts are applied differ among social workers (Rymsza 2011): over 80% of social workers use it in their work. 21.4 % of them consider it a good standard tool to be used in all cases, 56.7% as a good tool to be used in particular case and 16.9% as generally bad tool. However, when asked how many contracts a year they actually sign, most of them answer that between 1 and 4 (39.2%).

According to mentioned FGIs (Dudkiewicz 2011), social workers raise two problems connected to social contracts. First of all, they are very formalised and their explanation to beneficiaries as well as filling out is difficult and time-consuming. Second of all, it is often difficult to find the “leverage”, which would make a person comply. Yet, it should be signed only provided that conditionality may be executed (which proves especially difficult with the addicted). The cases of overruling the offices’ decisions about withdrawing or not granting allowances by territorial government boards of appeal are interpreted as taking an instrument of conditionality from hands of social workers. Moreover, the supplementary part of temporary allowance – which was planned by the legislators as an instrument of putting pressure on claimants to fulfil social contracts – is rarely used, since most of the *gminas* do not grant additional funds to that goal (012).

In cases, when a social worker decides that a person or a family should sign a social contract it will most certainly concern also active job search: regular visits in local PES, participation in workshops about job-search if available, etc. However, people who signed a social contract are automatically crossed out from local PES registers, which excludes from those forms of activation reserved for the registered unemployed (for details see next section). This solution – which leads to reduction of official levels of unemployment (those people are no more in statistics) – was questioned by employment officers as well as social assistance employees. As shown in the report evaluating the cooperation between employment and social assistance institutions, this regulation is – in some cases – perceived as obstacle towards activation (IBC GROUP and SMG/KRC 2009).

Social contracts give not only obligations but also some privileges. In many cases taking up employment may result in losing benefits, e.g. if income of a person or a family starts to exceed the income criterion. Yet, this does not necessarily apply if a person or a family signed a social contract. In that case social services may decide to complete its payment (regardless the current income) till the end of the period for which it was granted, but no longer than for 2 months.

Box 5: Losing benefits

- Lack of cooperation with a social worker,
- Refusal to sign a social contract,
- Breaking the social contract,
- Unjustified refusal to take up employment,
- Unjustified refusal to take up (or giving up) training, apprenticeship, vocational training, intervention works, public works, socially useful works,
- Unjustified refusal to undergo detox treatment.

Source: Act on social assistance from 2004 with amendments.

The most drastic form of conditionality are sanctions such as reduction, suspension or withdrawal of benefits. Some of the rules regarding it are not transparent and leave the

judgement to the discretion of a social worker: e.g. how to define unjustified refusal of training or lack of cooperation with social worker (see Box 5).

Allowances may be suspended or withdrawn also if a social worker decides that they are being wasted. However, if well-being of a person or a family was to be put at risk in-cash allowance could be changed into in-kind. There is also a practice to ban a family member responsible for waste (e.g. because of alcoholism or drug abuse) from taking.

4.2.3. Service provision

Employment services

Since 2004 the list of unemployed from the vulnerable groups was extended to MIP beneficiaries who finished social contracts, mothers who did not take up employment after childbirth, single parents with children up to 18 years of age (instead of 7), ex-convicts, people without job experience and secondary education. Those groups gained privileged access to ALMP instruments. In practice, it depends on the situation on local labour market, places left in various activation forms and number of local programmes (e.g. possibilities of social employment).

Box 6: Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups mentioned by the Act on employment and labour market institutions:

- Unemployed below 25 year of age,
- Long-term unemployed, unemployed who finished the social contract, women who did not take up work after childbirth,
- Unemployed over 50 years of age,
- Unemployed without vocational skills, job experience or secondary education,
- Unemployed single parents with at least one child under 18,
- Unemployed ex-convicts
- Unemployed disabled people

Source: Act on employment promotion and labour market institutions from 2004 with amendments.

As far as employment services are concerned MIP beneficiaries who are registered as unemployed may take part in various ALMP programmes depending on whether they belong to a vulnerable groups or not. The possibilities are presented in the table blow (Table No. 19). Participation in ALMP – with the exception of job agency and counselling – is tight to additional benefits. Their amounts vary from 20% to 120% of unemployment benefit.

Apart from the above, MIP beneficiaries – as well as all unemployed – may benefit from job agency offered by local and regional PES (also in the framework of EURES) and job advisory. There is also a possibility to apply for financial resources for starting up a business – but the money for it is often scarce (it depends on the policy of a *poviat*).

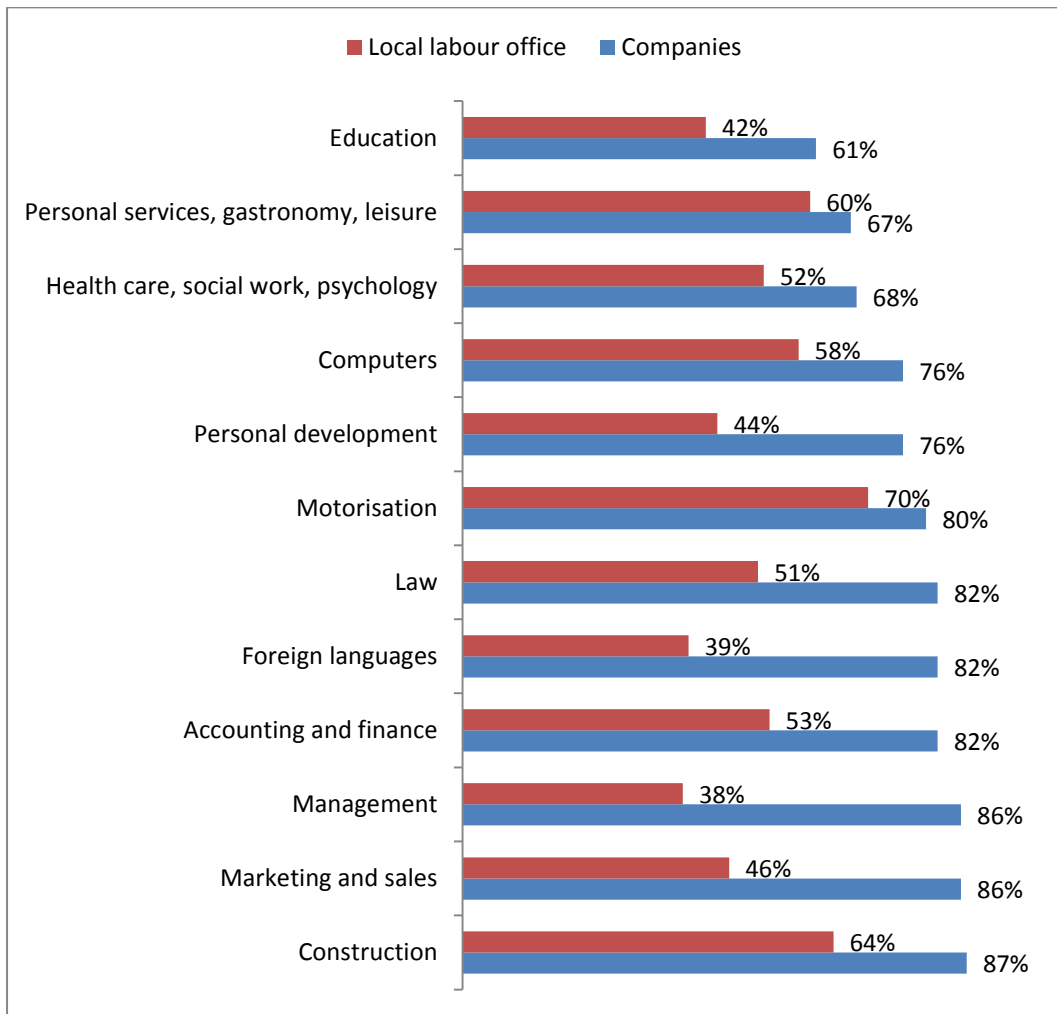
Table No. 20: Main ALMP instruments delivered by local PES

Type of measure	Name of a measure	Target groups
On-the-job training	Apprenticeship	Before 2009: young people (under 25 or aged between 25 and 27 and having finished their tertiary education less than a year before) After 2009: all the vulnerable groups
	Vocational preparation in the workplace (changed into vocational education of adults in 2009)	Before 2009: all vulnerable groups of unemployed except the young people
		After 2009: all unemployed and some additional groups (miners receiving special benefits; participants of Social Integration Centres or individual integration programmes; reserve soldiers; people receiving special training benefits)
Training	Training	Before 2009: all unemployed
		After 2009: all unemployed and other groups (workers during notice period dismissed for reasons relating to place of work; people employed in a bankrupt company; miners receiving special benefits; participants of Social Integration Centres or individual integration programmes; people receiving special training benefits; farmers or reserve soldiers seeking for employment outside the agriculture)
Others	Co-financing postgraduate studies (up to 300% of average salary)	After 2009: all unemployed and other groups (workers during notice period dismissed for reasons relating to place of work; people employed in a bankrupt company; miners receiving special benefits; participants of Social Integration Centres or individual integration programmes; people receiving special training benefits; farmers or reserve soldiers seeking for employment outside the agriculture)
	Loan for covering training costs without interests rate (up to 400% of average salary, 18 months for pay back)	All unemployed
	Scholarship for continuing education in a upper-secondary school for adults	The unemployed without qualifications.
	Refunds of partial costs of training of employees, provided that an employer has established a training fund in a company.	Employees. All unemployed: an unemployed hired in a replacement of employee participating in training.

Note: Unemployed MIP clients who sign a social contract lose the status of a registered unemployed and have no access to any of the abovementioned instrument.

Source: Act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 2004, with the amendment from 2009; WP2 report, Localise.

Figure No. 13: Which training offers do companies and local PES choose?



Source: Szczucka, Turek, Worek 2012: 64.

Trainings offered by local PES are often criticised in the interviews as not adjusted to the needs of the unemployed as well as labour market demand:

In the majority of job offices the range of trainings is very schematic – basic IT training, operators of fork-lift trucks, welder qualifications. There is a complete lack of cooperation with entrepreneurs, lack of analysis of the needs of local labour market and the labour markets nearby (O1).

Local PES offer two types of trainings – vocational and active job search (clients are thought how to look for work on their own, how to present themselves to employers, etc.). According to the report about the trainings and courses market in Poland (Szczucka, Turek, Worek 2012) there is a significant difference between the vocational trainings ordered by local PES and by private employers. The latter are interested in marketing, management, accountancy, whereas job offices organize trainings in motorisation, constructions and industry, personal services and gastronomy, IT and computers. In the key respondents interviews the theme of “florist courses for unemployed miners” was quite common as well as the revelations that IT courses often mean the basic knowledge about using computer and Internet.

Vocational trainings offered by local PES and financed from Labour Fund vary in terms of number of participants, potential duration, types of credentials to be gained (either specialist, such as license for fork-lift trucks, license of welder or general, such as certificate from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy confirming that a person has finished a particular course) as well as the entry requirements⁴³. In general, trainings are not targeted to specific vulnerable groups – entry requirements refer to the level of education (e.g. at least secondary, vocational secondary, etc.), acquired licenses (e.g. driving license) and health (lack of counter-indications for particular vocation). However, there are also more complex vocational activation projects implemented in the framework of Operational Programme Human Capital 2007-2013 by different institutions (e.g. local PES, local SAO, NGOs) which are directed to particular vulnerable groups (long-term unemployed, mothers returning to work after childbirth, unemployed over 50, etc.). They are often long-term and offer a variety of activities – not only vocational training, but also psychological support, cultural activities, medical check-ups, etc.

To sum up, most of the services are aimed at vocational activation – the wider understood social inclusion is considered just as support to this primary goal. Because of the difficult situation on many local labour markets (deficit of job offers) activation is set rather on up-skilling than work first.

Single parents

Unemployed single parents belong to a vulnerable group and are entitled to all ALMP instruments. The main impediment to their activation is maintaining the work-life balance, i.e. securing access to childcare.

Long-term unemployed

Long-term unemployed are eligible for all forms of activation programmes directed to vulnerable groups (see Table No. 20). Moreover, the percentage of LTU who participated in projects financed from EFS has increased between 2007 and 2010 from 25% to 34.5%⁴⁴.

In practice, LTU are considered a difficult group to activate (06, 016). In 2007, the activity directed to LTU (1.3) in the framework of the previous operational programme based on ESF financing (Sectorial Operational Programme Development of Human Capital 2004-2006) was realised only in approximately 50%. It was justified by the low motivation of the LTU to participate in ALMP instruments and to complete it and the general reluctance of employers to employ this group⁴⁵. Officers of local PES sometimes refer to LTU as “difficult” clients – their come back to labour market seems troublesome enough in time of economic prosperity, not to mention bad economy. This problem is acknowledged also by NGOs.

⁴³ There are no national data concerning trainings. However, on the basis of the [plan of trainings for 2013 in local PES in Wrocław](#) we can say that: 1) the number of participants varies between 24 and 70 (150 for job search trainings); 2) the number of hour varies between 40h (crane operator) and 624 (office management with English classes and practices).

⁴⁴ Data from:

<http://www.efs.gov.pl/AnalizyRaportyPodsumowania/poziom/Documents/sprawozdaniePOKL2007r.pdf> and http://www.efs.gov.pl/AnalizyRaportyPodsumowania/poziom/Documents/Sprawozdanie_PO%20KL_2010.pdf.

⁴⁵ Data from

http://www.mrr.gov.pl/aktualnosci/fundusze_europejskie_2004_2006/Documents/AIR2008_2005doc.pdf

Working poor

Working poor are not a group towards which any ALMP instruments from local PES are targeted, which makes it difficult for them to find a chance for up-skilling:

Working poor have to show great initiative. Many of the courses are available only for persons economically non-active (013).

Also the access of working poor to trainings is rather limited. Participation in life-long learning of population aged 25-64 in Poland is below EU27 average - 4.7% compared to 9.5% (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). As for the trainings provided by employers it is above the EU27 average – 26% compared to 28%(EWCS 2005). However, most of the trainings are directed to the qualified and long-serving employees and are provided by larger companies or public sector institutions (EWCS 2005; Kryńska 2009)⁴⁶.

Social services

In general, MIP beneficiaries do not have privileged access to any social services. They are distributed according to the needs of people and families and depend on the decisions of social workers. Apart from social work, which refers to all the support provided to clients in order to help them stand on their feet, those services divide into counselling and assistance or specialised care services. The former includes especially legal, psychological and family advice. The latter are provided to people, who are not able to perform everyday life activities by themselves (satisfy living needs, keep social interactions). Those who suffer from complex illnesses or are disabled are offered specialised services (such as rehabilitation).

In practice, availability of those services depends on the resources of a particular local SAO (or – in case of cities with *powiat* status – municipal family assistance centre). Units operating in the larger cities⁴⁷ are often able to deliver more services⁴⁸(see Szarfenberg 2011).

Social assistance units sometimes implement also the so called Centres of Local Activity⁴⁹. This is a method of work with local community aimed at social inclusion and joint solving of social problems. It comes down mainly to establishing a system of voluntary work and organising various support groups and mutual assistance groups, which are directed not only to those benefiting from social services but the whole neighbourhoods.

Integrated services

As mentioned in the section concerning reforms conducted in mid -2000s (section 2.1), people in especially difficult situations may also take part in programmes offered by centres of social inclusion or clubs of social inclusion – if such institutions are available in their localities. Their programmes often combine services aiming at increasing vocational skills or on-the-job trainings with various forms of counselling and group work. However, as shown by the research, availability of those institutions is rather low⁵⁰ (Rymysza 2011).

⁴⁶ Cited after WP2 report, Localise.

⁴⁷ Those are the cities with *powiat* status – realising the functions of two administrative levels (NUTS II and IV).

⁴⁸ In 2011, the average number of services offered by local SAO (LAU 2) was approximately 10, whereas municipal family assistance centres (LAU 1) approximately 31 (Szarfenberg 2011).

⁴⁹ Its existence depends on the decision of a particular unit and the policy of local authorities.

⁵⁰ According to the data of the Ministry of Labour and Social policy there are currently 70 Centres for Social Inclusion.

Developments in family policy

Answering the social need, European Commission demands, as well as the outcomes of control conducted by Highest Chamber of Control (NIK 2011), which underlined that the childcare is strongly insufficient in Poland, the nursery act was introduced in 2011. In governmental strategy “Poland 2030” presented in 2010 women’s activity on labour market was viewed as unquestionable social phenomenon that should be answered with investments in human capital. Therefore women should be supported, especially young working mothers (however nothing was said about women and men taking care of their elderly parents).

Nursery act presents new or updated forms of childcare: public nurseries, day carer and nanny. Establishment of new public nurseries was a crucial goal since most of the old public nurseries were closed in 90s by local governments. According to the nursery act, the state co-finances creating of new nurseries by a new program “Toddler”, with 40 million PLN in 2011, 60 mln in 2012 and 90 mln in 2013. The co-financing means that local government has to participate with 50% of costs.

Day carer is an option designed for young mothers who want to take care of their own child and several more children at home. Local government employs a person on the basis of contract of mandate (not contract for employment), which is regulated by Civic Code and not Labour Law. It may be viewed as a solution for single parents who have difficulties of finding a job on labour market due to the lack of care offer for the very small children.

The main problem still lies in financing. Local governments have problems with fulfilling the 50% of financial contribution. The immediate effect of nursery act was visible in the level of nursery fees – they increased for 160% (in Warsaw, from 189 PLN to 500 PLN. The local governments ignored protests of parents despite the fact that those decisions make nursery a luxury (worth noting that 6 thousand children wait for a place in public nursery in Warsaw). During first 6 months only 25 persons in Poland applied for the job of day carer probably because it was not advertised and popularised by local governments. Perhaps the problems lies also in the form of contract that does not offer employees’ benefits like holiday leave or sick leave.

In the opinions of key respondents, childcare is viewed as one of the most important barriers for single parents and their opportunities on labour market. The lack of childcare facilities near home or near place of work results in:

multidimensional discrimination, which is experienced by poor women who have to combine hard work, time-consuming commuting with home and family duties (016).

Moreover, an interesting preventive solution was introduced in 2011 called the family assistant. It is a person hired by *gmina*⁵¹ to work on a daily basis with families experiencing difficulties – especially those under threat of having their children taken from them and placed in foster families. Assistant’s task is to help in management of family budget, organisation of the day (or even cooking or shopping if needed). Those persons should either have higher education (preferably in social work or psychology) or life experience making

⁵¹ Costs of family assistants are partly covered by the state.

them qualified for the job. However, in some areas there are still difficulties to find suitable candidates.

As mentioned previously (3.1), the government announced further changes in family policy. Two immediate changes were announced – extension of parental leave to a year and different system of financing of crèches (lower contributions for local governments and subsidies for private entities establishing it). Numerous families were to be given higher tax reliefs for third and every next child. At the same time tax reliefs for families earning over 85 thousand PLN were to be abolished. Questions are raised about the paternal leaves of young people with atypical contracts, whether their situation is taken into consideration (currently they do not have the right to it).

4.3. The organisation of active inclusion delivery systems

4.3.1. Structure and operation of lead agencies

Local SAO play the key role in the delivery of AI. As already mentioned, they are responsible for both payment of allowances and social work (activation of clients). According to the cited qualitative study concerning the situation of social workers in Poland (Dudkiewicz 2011), organisation of work is differentiated – especially between smaller and larger local units. In case of the former, employees perform more universal functions, i.e. conduct social interviews, prepare all paperwork, make decisions about entitlement to transfers, etc. In case of the latter, the structure is often more hierarchically organised and the functions more specialised. Social workers participating in the study indicated minuses of both situations. The first one often results in overburdening with work, the second with red tape (waiting for the supervisor to sign every document). Moreover, excess formalisation of social work – the obligation to fill in numerous forms and provide broad documentation of every case – is often pointed out as one of the main problems in every-day work: it causes frustration, is time-consuming and unnecessary.

Social workers are a modestly paid vocational group. According to the cited quantitative research of social workers (Rymysza 2011), in 2011 the average net wage of a social worker from local social assistance office equalled 1852.83⁵² PLN. Most of them were employed full-time (97.7%) on permanent employment contracts (85.9%) or temporary contacts (12.4%) and atypical forms of employment were marginal (0.2%). Stability of work was emphasised as one of the strongest positive aspects of this work.

Local SAO are managed by *gminas* and the budget on wages depends on local policy, whereas bonuses are in the hands of office directors. It is, thus, difficult to determine, how pay is used to motivate employees. The level of wages is linked to several factors. Highest earners live in a big city, are between 41 and 50 years of age, have over 21 years of seniority, have occupational specialisation. This suggests that, in general, what counts is a period of service and certified specialisation.

Another important institutions in the field of AI are local PES. Even though number of employees varies immensely between small *poviats* and cities with *poviat* status, their structure is quite similar everywhere: registration, job agency, job advisory, subsidies and ESF programmes operate as separate units.

⁵² Net average pay for 2011 equaled approximately 2500 PLN.

Job agency and job advisory are regulated by detailed procedures (called standards), enumerating different activities, which have to be undertaken (many of them concern filling in documents). Also in case of employees of local PES paperwork seems to be consuming great amount of time: in the survey conducted in 2007 in all local PES, it was declared that they spent 44.3% of their time on administrative tasks (Piotrowski 2008).

Budgets of local PES lay in the hands of *poviat* authorities and depend on local policy. Wages and bonuses are managed by directors of offices. No information on average wages is available, but in cited the survey from 2007 56% of directors declared that they are not able to conduct a rational wage policy, which suggest low amounts at their disposal. The levels of bonuses for employees are indicated by law and vary between 500 to 700 PLN. Their distribution is based on three very general criteria: 1) results achieved at work (it is not defined how it should be measured), 2) punctuality in meeting deadlines, 3) good relations with co-workers.

Both employees of local PES and social workers have many possibilities to participate in trainings financed the ESF. However, no evaluation of those trainings is available. Above that, social workers, job advisors and job agents have the possibility to gain higher degrees of professional specialisation if they finish post-graduate specialised studies – what should result in higher earnings.

4.3.2. Inter-agency coordination

Local PES (operating at the middle administrative level, LAU 1) and local SAO (operating at the lowest administrative level, LAU 2) are not obliged to a broader cooperation and the competences are strictly divided. In 2009 the increased information exchange was enforced thanks to legal changes⁵³: it started to concern more groups of unemployed. New rule was also introduced stating, that a person who was a registered unemployed for a period longer than 6 months (or lost unemployment benefits more than 6 months ago) and was taking social assistance allowances should sign a social contract with social assistance or take part in other activation form available to social assistance⁵⁴, be presented with a job offer or be assigned to some kind of ALMP instrument (training, apprenticeship, public or intervention works).

The latest legal change, introduced in 2011, strengthened the linkage between local PES and local SAO in the area of sanctions. From that moment not only unjustified refusal to take up work, but also rejecting or giving up training, apprenticeship, vocational training at work place, intervention works, public works or socially useful works became a foundation for withdrawal, suspension or refusal of cash allowances from social assistance.

Moreover, the construction of the common data base, which will enable the information exchange between both agencies is nearly finished (010). Its Beta version is being tested. Our interlocutors emphasised lack of that system as an immense impediment to coordination because data gathered in local PES and local social assistance offices are incompatible and tracking paths of clients across them is impossible (06, 010, 012).

Some of the local PES and local SAO use SEPI (Local government Information Platform) – computer system, which facilitates information exchange between local institutions. Thanks to it documents do not have to be exchanged personally or by post in the form of hard copies

⁵³ Amendment to the Act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions from 19th December 2008.

⁵⁴ There may be other forms of activation at a disposal of social assistance such as placement in local programme of social assistance implemented by local authorities or in programmes carried out by a Centre of Social Inclusion.

and access to information about clients is quicker and less time consuming. However, the system is available only in some offices and requires signing mutual agreements about protection of personal data.

According to the quantitative research conducted in the framework of the evaluation of cooperation between labour market institutions (LMI)⁵⁵ and social assistance and social integration institutions (SASI)⁵⁶ (IBC GROUP and SMG/KRC 2009), the dominant forms of cooperation are in both cases exchange of information (confirmed by 95% of LMI and 88% of SASI); joint actions towards activation of socially excluded or people at risk of social exclusion (confirmed by 89% of LMI and 88% of SASI); and activities aiming at information and promotion of solutions for socially excluded or people at risk of social exclusion (confirmed by 84% of LMI and 86% of SASI). It is not clear what kind of specific activities are connected to those broad categories, but one may assume that the first two refer to the mentioned legal obligation to exchange information about MIP clients registered in local PES – especially those signing social contracts.

A rather critical view of the situation was expressed by some of the politicians and non-governmental organisations (04, 07, 015). One of the respondents refers to the experience from the current research of local PES and local SAO, indicating that cooperation is not institutionalised (depends of informal contacts) and even the sharing of information fails in some cases:

Everything is supposedly written in the law, but in practice there is no cooperation. I've been travelling across Poland with this project about local PES and local social assistance offices and I heard that they had no idea who from their clients is unemployed or who is a social assistance client. (...). For example labour offices didn't know that someone has signed a social contract. (...) And everyone emphasised the same thing – that it depends on whether Monika [from another institution] is my friend – not on the institutional cooperation.(04).

The level of cooperation between institutions varies between local units – there are cases in which a lot depends on informal contacts and power relations between key actors (e.g. conflicts between authorities from *gmina* and *powiat* may be an impediment to cooperation between local PES and local SAO). Also if the cooperation is imposed by the law it may fail in practice because of the poor information exchange. In result, clients may be kept in the dark about the possible forms of support: e.g. people registered in local PES may not be informed about the possibility to take part in a club for social inclusion or apply for MIP benefits, not to mention family allowances or help offered by third sector organisations. Collecting those pieces of information on one's own – although possible – is a task requiring time, effort and skills.

The officials from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy also emphasise that despite the introduced legal changes the cooperation turns out differently in different places. The system

⁵⁵ Labour Market Institutions refer mainly to local and regional PES, however other institutions were also included: voluntary labour corps (institution directed to activation of young people often from difficult backgrounds), vocational development centres (training firms often with very long tradition of educating).

⁵⁶ Social assistance and social integration institutions refer to local SAO, *powiat* family assistance centres, regional centres of social policy centres and clubs of social inclusion.

of financing is perceived as the main obstacle towards creating a more network model – but chances are that it will change in the near future:

I think we are close to legal changes enabling the cooperation between different administrative levels – from very basic reasons. This is a matter of financial flows. Today (...) the whole financial construction does not allow for much freedom. But if we work on the basis of project methods and engage all the local institutions, we will build civil society based on networks (010).

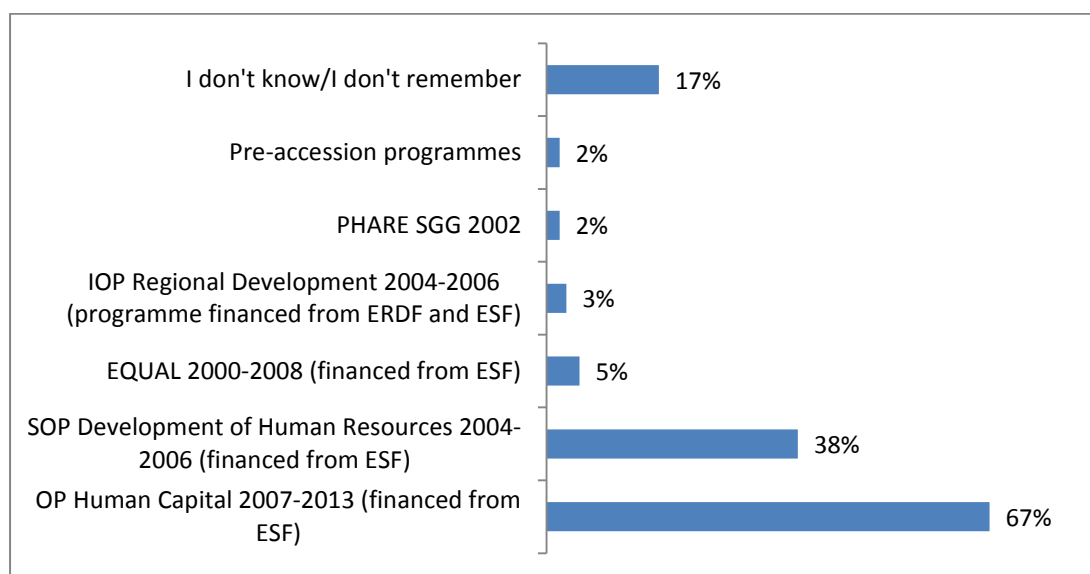
The current system of financing does not allow for integrating different resources in order to activate people: labour market instruments and social assistance instruments constitute two separate areas in this respect. The idea behind the reform is to enable creation of activation plans based on combination of different financing sources (Labour Fund and social assistance budgets).

The incoming legal changes in the area of labour market policy and social assistance may bring more incentives for the cooperation also thanks to increased personalisation (i.e. better supervision of steps taken by clients). However, it is difficult to assess it at this stage, because no official reform plan has been published yet.

Programmes financed from the ESF and other funds

Programmes financed by the EU seem to be an important stimuli for cooperation between institution operating in the field of employment and in the field of social assistance: according to the mentioned evaluative research 67% of LMI and 58% of SASI institutions declared that cooperation was connected to realisation of or participation in such programmes. Moreover, great many confirmed also participation of employees in common trainings for LMI and SASI institutions (respectively 46% and 56%), which most probably have also been financed from EU funds.

Figure No. 14: Programmes co-financed from EU funds in the framework of which joint projects with SASI institutions were implemented (respondents from LMI)

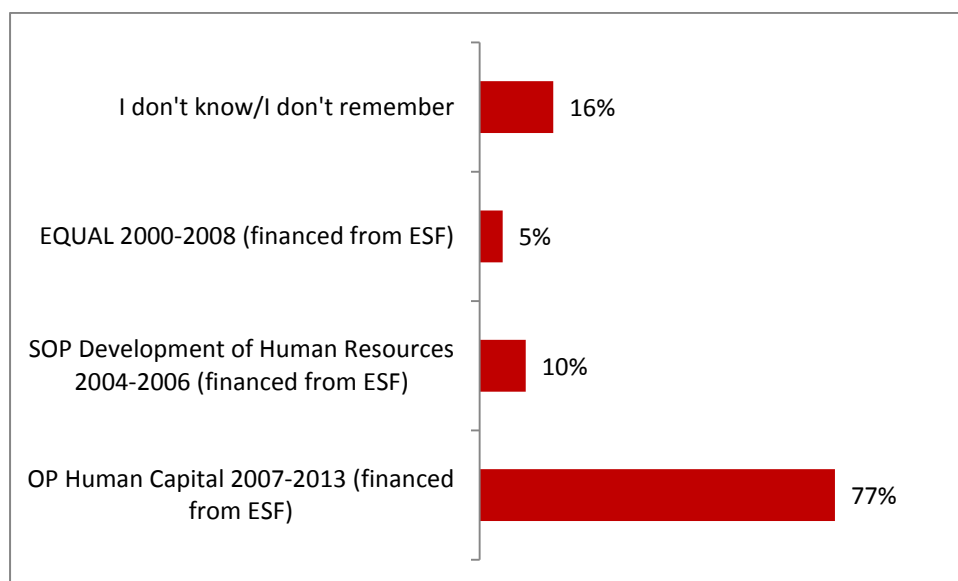


Source: IBC GROUP Central Europe Holding S.A. and SMG/KRC POLAND MEDIA S.A., 2009: 107.

The importance of EU funds for cooperation has increased in the last decade. 67% of LMI and 77% of SASI institutions declared that they carried out common project financed from the EU funds (ESF) in the programming period 2007-2012. Whereas in previous periods the percentages were significantly smaller (see figures 11 and 12)⁵⁷.

However, the scale of cooperation in the framework of EU funds seems not very large: according to the declarations of PES LMI they have carried out 5 such projects on average and SASI institutions 2 on average. Among the former most institutions have implemented 2 or 3 projects (13%) and among the latter project (43%).

Figure No. 15: Programmes co-financed from EU funds in the framework of which joint projects with LMI were implemented (respondents from SASI institutions).



Source: IBC GROUP Central Europe Holding S.A. and SMG/KRC POLAND MEDIA S.A., 2009:109.

ALMP instruments delivered in cooperation

In general, the delivery of transfers and services from the areas of employment and social assistance is not integrated, i.e. they are processed by different units. However, there are ALMP instruments, which require cooperation between local social assistance offices (or municipal family assistance centres) and local PES. Those ALMP instruments are presented in the table below (Table 21).

⁵⁷ Abbreviation used in the figures 10 and 11: *Operational Programme Human Capital, Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development Integrated Operational Programme for Regional Development*.

Table No. 21: ALMP instruments implemented in cooperation between local PES and local SAO.

Type of measure	Name of a measure	Target groups	Actors involved
Subsidised employment	Public works – subsidised employment in communities, municipalities or non-governmental organisations.	All vulnerable groups of unemployed and alimony debtors	<p>Public, sub-national:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → head of poviát → local PES (representing head of LAU 1) → also possibly gmina (lower local territorial unit, LAU 2) <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → also possibly NGO’s having as statutory activities one of the following: environmental protection, culture, education, sport, tourism, healthcare, unemployment, social assistance → water companies
	Socially useful works organised by communities, working time up to 10 hours/week	The unemployed receiving assistance from social assistance and not entitled to unemployment benefit	<p>Public, sub-national:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → head of poviát → local PES (representing head of LAU 1) → gmina also possibly local social Assistance offices or other gmina’s social assistance organisation (centres of social inclusion or clubs of social inclusion) <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → also possibly NGO’s having charity or activities for local community as statutory activities

Source: WP2 report, Localise.

Centres of social inclusion

Cooperation is also necessary between local SAO and centres of social inclusion. It is to some extent formally induced. First of all, local SAO may direct its client to the centre (with this person’s consent). Second of all, centres and offices have to agree on the individual plan of social employment of each of the centre’s participants. Finally, it is the office director who decides whether a person is to participate in the centre’s activities after one month probation period.

There are doubts concerning the quality of cooperation between local social assistance offices and centres of social inclusion. In the already mentioned evaluation report, it is emphasised that the competences of both bodies overlap, which causes competition instead of mutual support (IBC GROUP and SMG/KRC 2009).

4.3.3. Marketisation

The dominant role of public bodies in the process of delivery has not changed over the years. Local PES are responsible for registration of the unemployed, payment of benefits, granting financial support for starting up business, job agency and job advisory. In the current legal framework it is impossible to delegate those tasks to private bodies, although public-private cooperation in the last two areas is an option – it may be based on projects financed from ESF or everyday work with clients of local PES (private agencies may be acknowledged as a part of local networks and clients may be referred to them by the offices). However, as the research shows this type of public - private cooperation has so far been limited (IBRKK 2008, IBC GROUP and SMG/KRC 2009). Only trainings are based on contracting out. In general, private bodies deliver most of the trainings for local PES, whereas NGOs realise more complex and long term activation projects combining social and employment services and focused on excluded groups (mostly financed from ESF).

The situation is reverse in the area of social assistance, where contracting out is commissioned to non-profit organizations (*organizacje pożytku publicznego*)⁵⁸ not to firms. Thus, the role of third sector in the area of social assistance is primary to private sector. Three types of services have to remain under the competence of due public institutions: 1) deciding about the entitlements to allowances and conducting social interviews; 2) payment of social and health insurance contributions; 3) payment of allowances. Other – especially care services and specialised care services, management of care facilities may be contracted out (Balcerzak-Paradowska, Golinowska 2009). The decision whether to delegate some tasks to those organisations depends on the decision of local governments (it is optional) and its scale is still limited (Nitecki 2012).

The financing of ESF has enabled contracting out on a greater scale. The training market grew immensely thanks to the EU funds, which were used as a contribution to the Labour Fund (for details see 2.2) as well as source of financing of programmes such as the already mentioned Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources 2004-2006 and Operational Programme Human Capital 2007-2013 focused on vocational activation, up-skilling, life-long learning, challenges of the labour market, etc. In the survey conducted with training companies in 2007, 82.7% of employers admitted that trainings they organised were financed from the Labour Fund and 72.7% that the source of financing were the EU funds (IBRKK 2008). 41% of the existing training firms have been created in the period from 2006 - 2011 (HRP 2011). However, the competition for funds between public and private or third sector actors has been limited by the existence of the so-called systemic projects, i.e. projects directed only to public institutions⁵⁹ (PO KL 2007-2013). In other words, some financial resources have been reserved for projects to be carried out by public institutions and granted without open contests. This way – on the one hand – the role of non-public entities was reduced; and – on the other – public entities were protected from losing in the competition. This may suggest that there has been a general resistance towards too widespread marketisation. It may change in favour of the latter which the incoming reforms in the area of labour market policy and social assistance (see 4.1).

⁵⁸ Non-profit organizations are defined not only as non-governmental organizations, churches and religious associations, associations of territorial governments, social cooperatives, sport associations, etc.

⁵⁹ Systemic programmes divide into competitive (between public institutions) and non-competitive.

5. Assessment

5.1. A national strategy?

Measures to combat poverty and social exclusion are divided between many bodies, but the central authority has the prerogative of defining legal frameworks in which they are implemented and allocating the resources for majority of tasks. Local authorities must work within this frameworks. Own incomes of local governments – which are often scarce – are used in many cases to subsidise goals defined by the state. Although local governments are entitled to make decisions about additional financial support, it is the government that supervises and controls. An example of this approach is the discussion around the need for a subsidy to the cost of electricity for poorer people. The government has estimated how much can be spent on energy subsidies from the central budget and seeks for a solution that will be optimal with respect to this assumption. When planning the change, the government carried out a public consultation however the plan was to impose a single national system. Local governments are to play the role of contractors. They will probably be allowed to supplement the energy subsidies by their own means.

In the process of implementation of the objectives concerning poverty and social exclusion PES and social assistance cooperate intensively with the relevant structures at the central level (mainly with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) even though they are subordinated to local governments – which seems to be a legacy of the previous system. Even the administrative reforms undertaken in 1990s did not manage to change it. In result, the institutional fight against poverty in Poland is implemented in a paradigm shaped at the state, which is complemented by a variety of local governments' initiatives. Perhaps they would be more diverse, if local governments had more resources for their own activities in combating poverty.

The pressure to transform the paradigm into the national strategy to combat poverty is lower than it could be due to number of factors. First of all, the deeply enrooted beliefs concerning poverty come into play. From the beginning of the transformation poverty was associated with unemployment. Only part of the stakeholders (trade unions, NGOs) recognised unemployment as – to a large extent – structurally conditioned. Others have been considering it as mostly dependent on the will to work. Active attitude is expected from the unemployed, which is understood as being resourceful and self-sufficient. Shadow economy plays an ambivalent role in this respect. On the one hand, it seems to be the most prominent symptom of economic resourcefulness. On the other, it generates the problem of abusing the system (e.g. people who work illegally and collect allowances or register as unemployed). For years governments struggled with the grey economy in a very sluggish manner, assuming that it creates a specific “safety valve” for unemployed, working-poor, and also for business.

These abovementioned beliefs or attitudes refer also to the other groups of the poor. The famous categories of poor people as „foxes“ and “hedgehogs“, elaborated by Isaiah Berlin, are present in the media discourse. Another division into „resourceful“ and „demanding“ is frequent in public usage. The concept of the „demanding“ *homo sovieticus* was often invoked at the beginning of the transformation. All of these concepts distract the attention from the discussion on the structural causes of poverty. The emphasis is put on individual behaviour patterns and their individual motives. They are all based on an easy division into deserving and undeserving poor.

The second factor weakening pressure on the national strategy is the issue of migration. Large emigration from Poland to some countries of the European Union after 2004 resulted in the weaker political and social pressure on the public authorities to conduct more effective fight against poverty. It is estimated that in 2011, 1.67mln of Polish citizens were residents of other EU member states, of which approximately 73% for earning purposes. The greatest number of Polish migrants currently lives in the UK, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands (Informacja 2012). Migrant workers (partly form the population of working poor and the unemployed) do not burden the benefit system in Poland, what might have been the case if they stayed. Moreover they make financial transfers to families living in Poland.

The third factor is, paradoxically, the funding of anti-poverty policy from European resources. The key-words such as activation and social inclusion are treated very superficially and this practise is legitimised. It results in a lack of deeper thought about optimal activities adjusted to the specific national needs and social preferences in Poland.

Fourth important factor is the institutional inertness. Despite the growing need for integrated policy the institutions and stakeholders are still unable to change their mode of operation. State institutions seem to be reluctant to other stakeholders, many of whom are dissatisfied with the their low impact. Therefore they see current government as the dominant force. Especially, trade unions the most influential anti-poverty stakeholders have been dissatisfied with the social dialogue on poverty and ALMP in recent years.

Strategy to combat poverty is always a choice of goals in the situation of limited resources. Poverty areas in Poland are very deep, so strategic thinking is based on the desire to address help to those, who will not survive biologically without this assistance. Thus, the strategy is not aimed at social inclusion, but rather at sustaining the subsistence minimum. In addition, supported groups include the most needy: children, sick, disabled, elderly, less to others, who "need to fend for themselves". Social workers (an to a lesser extent PES officers) base many of their decisions on discretionary criteria. It is expected of them to distribute benefits or inclusion instruments only after a careful process of just verification.

Since the middle of the last decade the main weakness of the inclusion agenda is the dependence on budget deficits issue. The most influential stakeholders (government, mainstream politicians) underline that the country currently cannot afford a more generous policy.

The 2020 strategy was developed when the [economic] situation was a little bit better than now...so the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy points out that we will probably not be able to immediately improve our situation against the European background, but it will certainly help to achieving the average (Interview No. 015).

Another weakness of inclusion agenda is that social assistance is provided only at that stage of depletion when the client is truly dependent and without resources. Whereas, the instruments of support for people in relatively difficult situations – such as, for example, working poor or young mothers wanting to return to the labour market are scarce.

5.2. A strategy for all working-age groups?

The system has several characteristic features concerning strategies for different working-age benefit claimants. The system is mostly focused on the unemployed. There is a division of responsibilities between local PES, which focus on support for short-term unemployed (who are easier to activate) and social assistance offices that deal with long-term unemployment (people often referred to as “difficult clients” in local PES).

Long-term unemployed pose a serious challenge to institutions. In the view of key respondents the support for LTU should include psychological support along with vocational training. Many of the various activation programmes that were introduced thanks to EU funds were focused on LTU. However the question of their evaluation and long-term effectiveness (finding a job) remains open. In 2008, the participation of LTU in the trainings was estimated on the level of 27.6% of the whole group of trainees, whereas LTU constituted over 60% of all registered unemployed (NIK 2008).

The instruments directed to the unemployed lack more systematic focus on social inclusion and therefore may be interpreted as quite superficial, with low unemployment benefits for a minor group of unemployed and high dependency on short-term projects, which sometimes include social inclusion perspective.

Working poor seem to be a new subject. The phenomenon of work that does not cover material or social needs is recognised, however it is not a strong element of current policies. WP are excluded from the social assistance benefits even though their material status may be below the income threshold. Local PES still do not offer systematic support for WP, with job offers for minimum wage, part time. They do not serve as centres for social inclusion for unemployed and working poor, which was underlined by respondents. The trainings, which could be available for WP do not enable to change job for a better one.

Therefore the needs of WP are not met. Several obstacles could be pointed out referring to everyday life problems: difficulties with access to trainings caused by geographical distance, lack of day care for children, long working hours and intensiveness of work that prevents from participating in trainings or seeking for career advice. The fact of in-work status makes WP secondary in the debate of poverty in Poland.

In case of SP a significant phenomenon comes to light. Several years ago, in time of forming the strategy “Poland 2030” the government finally accepted the concept of Work Life Balance and the need of supporting the family choices that combine work with family duties. It was quite a political novelty because only a couple of years earlier women were encouraged to stay at home and take care of children. However, the issue of single parents and their multidimensional problem, which is combining work, family and avoiding risk of poverty, is still not deeply recognised. What is significant the problems of SP quite easily drop to category of “ideological debate”, with the view that support for SP would weaken the institution of family. There are also arguments that it is the numerous families that should be more supported.

In result, the needs of SP are not well addressed due to the more general problems of family policy. The lack of childcare facilities is a serious obstacle because it forces SP to seek expensive childcare on private market or informal childcare among other family members. In case of not finding – SP become unemployed.

The vision of children as a “private matter” is also visible at local PES where there are no places dedicated for children. The presence of day carer at local PES would be supportive for SP and other parents seeking for job.

Situation of WP and SP is an example that the system is in the process of learning that the simple division in-work versus out of work does not solve all the problems of poverty and more precise approach is very needed.

The important background for all social groups – LTU, WP, SP, which cannot be omitted is the housing problem. The access to communal housing is very restricted and the number of people waiting for social housing is always many times higher than the supply of apartments. The prices of renting on private market are often unaffordable for families of single parents and working poor. In case of owning an apartment, many of the WP, SP or LTU cannot apply for the housing allowance because the surface of the apartment is above the limit. The lack of affordable housing prevents from mobility in search for better work.

In summary, the system is mainly focused on unemployed. The trainings for long-term unemployed appeared in 2004 and since then their number increased due to the ESF funds, which defined LTU as a special group. Before accession there were no funds focused specifically on activation of long – term unemployed.

The system offers only modest financial support and employment agency services. System of trainings lacks long-term vision and adjustment to the local labour market demands. The idea is rather based on random “mix and match” with EU funds playing important but short-term role. Unemployed with higher qualifications may seek on their own for trainings that are suitable for their needs and apply for financing from PES. However PES usually do not provide any job offers for them. The situation and specific needs of WP and SP are still not addressed in more profound way.

In theory the employed and unemployed status should offer access to health care insurance. This indeed is the case of unemployed who are cover with the insurance. However in case of WP and other working the situation may vary depending on their type of contract. The more and more popular civic contract for specific task do not include health care insurance therefore the practice shows that employment and working status are not a guarantee of health care insurance anymore.

The system may be viewed rather as default, lacking institutional resources, and the cooperation between different institutions on local level is still too dependent on informal contacts.

5.3. A multi-dimensional approach to working age poverty?

The approach to working age poverty is highly fragmented. Two main sources of it may be identified: the legacy of the “sectorial” – or sometimes even “departmental” – state and the reactive approach towards social policy. The former manifests itself though the lack of one body (centre) responsible for policy shaping. Different arrangements are designed in different places and coordination is limited to commenting detailed regulations. Traditional policy divisions limit the influence of concepts such as OMC or active inclusion, which are based multi-sectorial and multi-level approach towards social policy.

The latter is an effect of large-scale social problems connected to mass unemployment which occurred in the early 1990s. Social policy was an instrument used to alleviate them. This pattern has not changed significantly over the years. Policies addressing very basic survival needs constructed *ad hoc* to answer the most acute problems have been supplemented by not sufficiently considered ALMP. In result, no holistic and preventive approach towards social policy has been developed over the years.

Moreover, the dynamics of relations between the central government and local governments has not been working in favour of broader and cross sectorial social innovations, since it has been based on cost avoidance strategy (see 3.3.).

The EU accession had a positive impact on inclusion of third sector partners into policy planning and policy implementation. Although questions are raised about the scope of their actual influence on its shape, their presence should be acknowledged. This way potentially more subjects may be brought in to the political agenda by their advocates.

It is difficult to assess unequivocally the overall direction of reforms connected to combating poverty. On the one hand, the emphasis was put on ALMP, however the system has been set on up-skilling rather than work first approach (mainly because of scarcity of employment opportunities). On the other, some arrangements aimed at coordinating the areas of labour market policy and social assistance policy were introduced, but they have so far failed to provide an integrated support for people experiencing poverty: it is possible for the more enterprising people to make use of different forms of support, but the pieces of information are often difficult to collect and take a lot of time and effort.

Conclusion

Mass unemployment at the beginning of transformation has forced poverty mitigation policy ("emergency" policy) rather than prevention. Accession to the EU resulted in rescaling policy from more passive to more active. However, no coherent system based on prevention and vision of the future was designed. On the one hand, notions such as "active inclusion" or "flexicurity" have been used more as slogans, than incentives for development of more cross-sectorial and multidimensional policy. On the other, the presence and availability of such approaches formulated at the EU level has served as substitute for more in-depth discussion about a national model of combating poverty and social exclusion.

Another important feature is related to the public choice. Polish state dedicates relatively limited resources to the system, compared to other European countries considering the scale of the problems in Poland. Benefits are low and set on fulfilling biological needs rather than social – despite the protests of some stakeholders, income criteria of eligibility have not been raised until recently (for six years in case of social assistance benefits and eight in case of family benefits).

In result of those factors, the system remained fragmented and – simultaneously – highly dependent on the central state structures. It is constantly improved but the changes are perceived as chaotic and reactive. It seems related also to the institutional drift. Polish administration no longer works in the bureaucratic paradigm, but it still does not work entirely in the paradigm of New Public Management, which makes small, incremental changes a lot easier to make than more complex and holistic ones.

There is a visible lack of a public debate on a more appropriate strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion and other social priorities. The paradigm of inclusion based on human capital investments, very popular in the developed countries, is implemented in Poland with a focus on semi-training, rated as "poorly tailored." Despite the widespread belief that investment in children is the best investment in the future, this issue is also not approached comprehensively.

The issue of social rights still elicits many controversies. Despite the introduction of a *quasi* GMI the MIP is commonly perceived as basic support for those people who really cannot help themselves (because they have some kind of dysfunctions) or cannot count on family support. Those who question administrative decisions concerning granting benefits tend to be perceived as "sly foxes" and even "crafty fellows" and their attitude is classified as "claiming and demanding" by social workers as well as participant of public debates. This discourse is most certainly connected to the scale of social problems Poland had to cope with in the last 20 years and the drastic structural changes that occurred in this period. The tendency to "individualise" financial successes as well as failures (i.e. falling into poverty) was connected to the limited capacity of the state to protect its citizens from the consequences of systemic transformation as well as the strong belief that under democracy and capitalism people could achieve everything if they worked hard enough. Public debate seems to be slowly opening to other views and more systemic reflections, also thanks to its shifting to the internet (blogs, online journals, etc.).

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