

Poland. The Implementation of the National Action Plan of Social Inclusion at Regional and Local Level.

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Introduction

In August 2004, the Polish government has developed the NAP Inclusion. This report is the fifth subsequent document describing problems related to the performance of NAP Inclusion in Poland. The first report, dated in 2004 covered preparations to NAP Inclusion, the second and third dated 2004 assessed its contents and the assumed monitoring methods. The second report in 2005 described the progresses in implementation of NAP Inclusion in Poland.

The conclusions of this report were as follows:

- Overall evaluation of progress in performance of the NAP Inclusion is significantly restricted by the lack of a monitoring system. The lack of coordination and ongoing monitoring system for NAP Inclusion may result in weakening of the impacts of this comprehensive operational programme.
- Data obtained by the expert indicate that many of the NAP Inclusion tasks are being carried out. Performance of other tasks, however, is encountering significant obstacles. They are more particularly related to: inadequate legislative solutions, insufficient state budget resources, allocated to the performance of some of the tasks, excessively complicated procedures related to the access to some benefits, delays in execution of projects financed by the *European Social Fund*.
- It should also be noticed that there are positive outcomes of different activities implemented within NAP Inclusion framework. It applies to projects related to the development and extension of the career consulting and information networks for young school graduates entering the labour market, employment programmes for youth and programmes on employment and social integration for excluded or persons under the risk of exclusion. The programme covering prevention of social exclusion and crime of children and youth is also being implemented with success.

The current report¹ is devoted to the implementation of NAP Inclusion in selected regions of Poland, representing different levels of local administration and different socio-economic characteristics. The covered regions are: warmińsko-mazurskie voivodship, and the towns of Radom, Przasnysz (municipality and community), community Nidzica and village Janowo. Reports covering performance of NAP Inclusion in selected areas have been written in vignette format. In the first part of the report, I am presenting general conclusions concerning performance of NAP Inclusion based on information collected in the selected regions.

¹ This report could be developed thanks the information delivered by several social assistance institutions and labour offices (at regional, provincial and local levels) as well as the staff of local and municipal authorities in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region, in Przasnysz, Radom, Nidzica and Janowo, and also of the social assistance department of the Ministry of Social Policy.

The report mainly concentrates on selected problems, reflected in the Commission Staff Working Paper on Social Inclusion in the New Member States.

It mainly focuses on the following priorities:

- Equalization of educational opportunities for youth, more particularly by decreasing differences in quality of education and provision of financial support for students, especially those originating from poor families,
- Activation and integration of groups threatened by social exclusion,
- Ensuring that social protection systems have sufficient coverage and levels of payment to guarantee an adequate minimum income for all to live with dignity, while at the same time removing disincentives to take up employment,
- Improvement of the administrative capacity of policy implementation, strengthening of the social policy institutions and improvement of the general coordination of inclusion policies at the local level.

Additionally, the parts of the report describing performance of NAP Inclusion in selected regions and communities, includes examples of good practices related to the activation of local communities and recipients of social assistance.

Implementation of NAP Inclusion at regional and local level.

Equalization of educational opportunities for children and youth.

Despite the significant educational progress in the Polish society, taking place in Poland, during the transformation period, there is persistent and even worsening differentiation between educational attainment levels between inhabitants of towns and rural populations (see: my first report on social inclusion from 2004). This differentiation does not only apply to the availability and also the quality of education.

Comparison of results of the OECD PISA study from 2003 and 2000 indicates a general improvement in the quality of education in Poland, with a simultaneous decrease in the differentiation in quality of education. At the same time, there are smaller differences between schools with higher diversification within schools themselves. This could be the effect of the educational system reform, introduced in 1999². The PISA study shows that differences in test results persist, depending on the social and economic status of the parents. As compared to other OECD countries, the differences observed in Poland are relatively high³. The family

² The reform, has among other things, extended the period of mandatory education by one year.

³ Compare with the results of the PISA study [Wyniki badania PISA 2003], www.ifispan.waw.pl.

status translates to the opportunity of frequenting a “better” school. This situation is most certainly affected by a variety of factors, such as: higher ambitions of the parents having a better social and economic standing, but also their financial abilities (costs of driving children to more distant schools, additional non obligatory payments to schools, etc.). In this context, financial support for school children and higher education students, even though it is not the only necessary instrument, may to some extent improve the equality of opportunities of the youth in the educational process.

NAP Inclusion includes a broad scope of measures with respect to educational situation of children and youth. The implementation status of those measures has been described in report No 2 from 2005⁴. One of the significant elements of NAP Inclusion is the development of financial assistance for school children and students originating from poor families. The new financial support system for students originating from poor families is based on several programmes:

- Assistance to primary and secondary school students in the form of scholarships and allowances financed from the state budget,
- Assistance to tertiary students in the form of scholarships financed from the state budget,
- Assistance to secondary school students from rural areas and support for tertiary students originating from marginalization-threatened areas, including rural and industrial restructuring areas, financed from the *European Social Fund*.

The short period of implementation of those programmes is not allowing evaluation of their impact on equalization of educational opportunities for children and youth. In the report No 2 from 2005 I have described implementation of the financial assistance programme for students, pointing out, at the same time, the difficulties related to its performance⁵. In this report, I am presenting performance of financial assistance programmes for youth and higher school students at regional and local level. The conclusions from field studies are as follows:

⁴ Including, among others, the implementation of the support to the children from poor families “pierwsza wyprawka” [my first school kit], development of the network of Mobile Centres for Job/Career Information and in- school career information and consulting centres and performance of ALMP for young unemployed.

⁵ The launch of the financial assistance programmes was delayed due to the lack of adequate legal framework. Additionally, the local authorities, expected to provide the assistance programs are complaining and reporting shortage of funds.

There were also delays in the initiation of the *European Social Fund* funded programs. Difficulties arose in the process of applying for resources from the *European Social Fund* and required methods of documentation of the expenses borne by student under the assistance schemes. Those scholarships have first been paid last year, after Poland’s accession to the EU. Due to the high number of applications, the average amount of scholarship was lower than the maximum amount[□] in many regions of the country. Youth often received their scholarships with several month delays. Due to the complexity of procedures and lack of preparation on the local administrative staff, the available resources have not been 100% used in many regions of the country (see: my second report in 2005).

- Programmes of scholarship for school children and higher school students are creating a completely new quality in terms of the assistance being provided. Until their initiation in 2004, access to student scholarship schemes based on the poor financial standing of the family was extremely restrictive. Such scholarships were granted by local government institutions, and, in some cases, by the NGO organizations, operating in some of the regions. Also the access to scholarship for high school students was limited, mainly depending on the type of school⁶,
- Insufficient financial resources from the state budget have been allocated to the performance of scholarships programmes. As a consequence of that fact, the support budgeted for school year 2004/2005 has not reached all those in need⁷. Additionally, the shortage of state budget resources allocated to scholarships has resulted in a significant geographical differentiation of scope (different levels of the income threshold qualifying to assistance) and duration of scholarship periods,
- The complicated procedures of granting financial assistance to school students, both in the case of programmes financed from the state budget and ESF schemes resulted in the fact that some students, qualified to the assistance have not received it or received a lower amount. This is mainly related to the rules regulating compensation of incurred expenses, whose scope is defined in the assistance procedures at many levels,⁸
- There are significant delays in performance of the assistance, both in programmes supported by EFS and state budget funds. In consequence, the support is not reaching those in need in a systematic manner and does not contribute to an significant improvement of the social security of students and their families. Moreover, along with the implementation of financial assistance for students, the government has eliminated tax deductions for students' living away from schools commuting. The lack of stability in financing student assistance might impact worsening the situation of the families, which were benefiting from those tax deduction in the past.

Financial assistance for people living in poverty.

In Poland, social assistance is the main tool in providing financial support to people living in poverty. For many years already, the social assistance system has been suffering from a shortage of funds, as compared to the needs (see: my first report on social inclusion from

⁶ Those scholarships could only be granted to the students of public higher schools. At least 50% of students attend paid non-public schools.

⁷ The assistance was often limited to the school children and students originating from extremely poor families (see Przasnysz and Nidzica).

⁸ In the case of very poor students, it happens that the family is unable to cover the expenses related to qualification to the assistance. Additionally, the terms and procedures are often unclear, or do not cover all the education-related expenses.

2004). As a result of this situation, the social assistance allowances paid were too low, or were paid over a too short period of time. This mainly applied to the so-called periodic allowances, whose payments were until May 2004 not mandatory. Until April 30, 2004, those benefits were solely financed from the state budget. They are granted to people and families being temporarily in a poor financial situation, due to one of the 13 dysfunctions, listed in the Social Assistance Act⁹.

The new Social Assistance Act, implemented in May 2004 tried to cope with that situation. It has introduced mandatory periodic allowances at a minimum level, equal to 1/5 of the individual income gap in the family¹⁰. The communities may increase the amount of welfare assistance payments from their own funds.

Information collected in selected regions and town in Poland indicates that the objective of the policy have been partially achieved:

- The new solutions have improved the financing of the social assistance to the poor families, as compared to the situation taking place in most of the analyzed locations in 2003. In average, the benefits are being paid in higher amounts and for longer periods of time,
- There are still significant but not justified with the financial standings of the families, differences between communities, in terms of the amount of benefits and the average period of their payment,
- In general communities are not very interested in investing their own funds in the financial assistance to the poor. Only one of the analyzed communities has decided to increase the mandatory amount of periodic allowances to the level of ½ of the income gap. In other communities, the periodic allowances are paid at minimum level, guaranteed by the state budget.

Towards more active social policy. Activation and integration of groups threatened with social exclusion.

One of the main challenges defined in the CSWP to be reflected at the regional and local level is the redefinition of the social policy from redistributive measures towards activation policies for marginalized groups. NAP Inclusion defined main measures addressing the challenges:

⁹ These are: poverty, orphanhood, homelessness, unemployment, disability, persistent or critical illness, need to protect maternity or large families, helplessness in upbringing, educational and housekeeping issues, especially in incomplete or large families, alcoholism and drug addiction, need for integration in the community, including former incarceration convicts, random emergency and crisis situations, natural or environmental disasters (bill dated March 12, 2004 on social assistance).

¹⁰ The bill provides for systematic increasing of the mandatory amount of the welfare assistance benefit to ½ of the income gap by 2009.

- New legislative framework on social employment (establishing the Centres and Clubs of Social Integration),
- New legislative framework on social assistance (introducing the social contract),
- New legislative framework on promotion of employment (special framework of active labour market measures for marginalized groups at the labour market (long-term unemployed, low-qualified, disabled etc), supported by the European Social Fund programs.

a) Social Employment

In report No 2 from 2005 I have described performance of social employment programmes, based on the social employment act¹¹. This legislation is defining the legal conditions for establishment of social integration clubs and centres for people excluded from the labour market. The purpose of those clubs and centres is to carry out assistance programs adapted to the individual needs of the participants (beneficiaries) such as acquisition of social skills, vocational education and labour¹². Whereas the Centres are expected to carry out social and vocational integration programmes by providing intense, daily, several month work, adapted to the needs of the beneficiary, the formula of the Social Integration Clubs is significantly looser. Information collected in selected areas of Poland leads to the conclusion that the social integration centres and clubs may become a good instrument for social integration of people excluded from the labour market under the condition they are good planned and adopted to the local circumstances. However we can not assume, that in all cases the projects may lead to professional and vocational activation.

Data presented in the report No 2 from 2005 and on information collected in selected areas, indicate that the establishment of social integration centres and social integration clubs develops rather fast. It is mainly being carried out by social assistance centres, which are most exposed to the needs related of excluded persons. On the other hand, as underlined by the social workers, the formula of those institutions is a good opportunity for collaboration between social assistance institutions and employment services. Quick expansion of the social integration clubs and centres is possible thanks to the financial support provided by the Ministry of Social Policy and some of the Regional Centres (Regional Social Policy Centre in Olsztyn). However, the generalization of social integration clubs may also result from the fact

¹¹ The bill dated June 13, 2003 on social employment (Official Journal 1143/122/2003).

¹² According to the information provided by the Ministry of Social Policy, covering applications for establishment of Social Integration Centres, 12 of the project applications have been accepted and seven such centres are already operational. Most of the centres are established by the local elected authorities. The planned number of participants to be covered by the approved project applications is 800. The group of people covered by the Centres' services and activities is dominated by persistently unemployed. It also includes homeless people, drug and alcohol addicts, former prisoners and mentally ill.

that following the new Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions, the establishment of such institutions is the required condition for the community to obtain subsidies for so-called public works. For many communities, public works became not only a form of subsidizing work for persistently unemployed, but also (and mostly) a way to subsidize community investments.

We have to underline that working with people who have been excluded from the labour market for a long time requires adequate preparation of the personnel and a high level of specialized qualifications. Launching such an initiative without a well-thought programme and specialized resources may fail to bring benefit to the people covered with the scheme. Therefore, the arising new social and vocational integration institutions shall obtain not only financial but also more essential and technical support through the exchange of good practices¹³, expertise and training.

The experience so far indicates that the methods and goals of those social integration institutions must be adapted to the local conditions of the environment they are being implemented in. More particularly, it does not seem that the activation measures could be an efficient method of activation in rural and small-town communities¹⁴, even though they may lead to a better performance of their beneficiaries in both the community and family.

b) Social contracts

The key task of social assistance is social work, aiming at bringing people and families covered by the assistance to a recovery of their social functions, including economic independence. One of the methods of social work is the conclusion of a social contract between the person or family and the social worker. Until 2004, in some cases, the social contract has been used by social workers as a formula enhancing social work, without any legal regulations. In the new Social Assistance Act, the social contract has been legally regulated as “a written agreement, concluded with the person applying for assistance, defining the rights and obligations of the parties to the agreement, under the jointly undertaken actions and measures, aiming at overcoming the difficult life situation of the person or family”¹⁵

The principle of social contract has been implemented by several social assistance centres way before the implementation of the new Social Assistance Act. Social workers do underline that, even though the formulation of a legal framework for the social contract was positive for the development of this form of collaboration with their clients, the solution proposed by the legislation is not always adequate to their needs. In particular, there is significant discrepancy between the understanding of the objective and methods of social contract performance. In the

¹³ An example of good practice is undoubtedly the Social Integration Centre in Olsztyn

¹⁴ See: Social Integration Club in Janowo.

¹⁵ Social Assistance Act, art.6 p. 6.

legislation, the social contract is treated as a tool, ensuring total resolution of the problems of people and families and leading to their financial independence (employment). On the other hand, as demonstrated by the experience of some of the social assistance centres¹⁶, it should be a tool applied selectively, to a specific group of beneficiaries, aiming at gradual improvement of their functioning and correction of drastic behavioural insufficiencies (lack of habits such as cleaning of the apartment, preparation of meals or resolution of children upbringing and education problems). Application of the social contract as a social work tool requires good preparation of the social workers. Additionally, it needs support of a widely understood social infrastructure (adequate facilities, sufficient number of social workers who can spend their time carrying out social work with people and families, psychotherapeutical centres, psychological consulting, etc. – which requires collaboration of a significant number of institutions). Failure to meet the above requirements may lead to a weakening of the efficiency of those measures and, by the same token, to the disappointment of people covered by this form of social work and social workers involved in those activities.

The Ministry of Social Policy has recently undertaken monitoring activities covering expansion of the social contract as a method of social work. Unfortunately, the monitoring activities are only covering the number of social contracts being signed, without referring to broader circumstances of the tasks being carried out. We could already observe that such an approach may indeed accelerate generalization of the social contract, without adequate resources and preparation, and lead to a worsening in perception of its role and efficiency in the activation of beneficiaries of the social assistance.

c) Role of the ESF and ALMP

With the possibility of funding tasks out of ESF, the number of people encompassed by long-term vocational activation programs increased. At the same time there was a reduction in allocation of funds from national level (Labour Fund) in activation programs for the long-term unemployed.

In the report No 2 from 2005 I wrote that the activities planned under this priority are mainly performed as part of the operational programme financed from *European Social Fund* resources.¹⁷ Field studies have demonstrated that EFS is significantly enhancing the existing

¹⁶ I.e. Radom and Przasnysz.

¹⁷ Of all the approved projects, the largest number is related to the activation of long-term unemployed, and preventing marginalization of youth. Many of projects propose standard activities, delivered by the labour offices in form of training, job consulting or labour clubs. Projects on preventing youth marginalization are most frequently initiated by NGO's and local elected authorities. They often include innovative, non-standard solutions focused on various groups of children and youth, exposed to the risk of social exclusion. The group of projects focusing on people threatened by social exclusion presented by the NGO organizations include activities related to social economics and social integration. Many of the projects focused on people threatened with social exclusion have obtained support under the *Community Initiative EQUAL*. Activities under the EQUAL initiative are at their initial phase of implementation.

measures aimed at people excluded from the labour market or threatened by exclusion. On the other hand, the activity of local employment offices and social assistance centres in developing and implementing programs covering exclusion from the labour market is insufficient. Additionally, traditional methods (subsidized work) are predominant in the activities focused on this group of people. Gradually however, there are some innovative approaches, often being undertaken by NGO organizations.

It is worth noticing that employment offices are creating their own regional policies. Faced with a difficult labour market situation in their regions, they do not always treat the problem of activation of people long-term excluded from the labour market as their priority task. In the meantime, social assistance centres, which are often carrying out interesting and innovative activities for social integration and activation, do not have adequate methods and resources to achieve vocational activation.

d) Good practices in activation policies

Activities aimed at social integration and activation, carried out by social assistance centres in various communities, towns and regions in Poland do constitute a wealth of expertise and good practices, which could be better spread. They do extend beyond the legislative framework defining the tasks of social assistance and are often carried out in collaboration with and with support of NGO organizations. Those activities include: programme of the Local Activity Centre, established by the Municipal Centre for Social Assistance in Radom, Voluntary Programme carried out by the Municipal Centre for Social Assistance in Przasnysz, or the Social Integration Centre in Olsztyn, further described as examples of good practices. An interesting and new experience is the establishment of a coalition for prevention of violence in the family (warmińsko-mazurski region, Przasnysz) and many others. Discussions I have had with people involved in providing social assistance in several towns of Poland indicate that they lack a broader platform for exchange of expertise and information, supporting expansion of good practices and best usage of the available knowledge.

Coordination of social policy and reinforcement of social assistance institutions

Until 1989, Poland was a centralized country. The public administration reforms, implemented during the transformation period, have introduced a multi-layer self-government administration system, based on the principle of subsidiarity: 16 self-government regions [*voivodships*], almost 400 self-government districts [*poviats*] and over 2,500 communities [*gminas*]. Along with the process of decentralization of the state administration, social policy competencies have been gradually delegated to different levels of the self-government

administration. As a result of this process, a major part of the tasks covered by social assistance, employment, education, health and housing policies were transferred to the competence of self-government administration institutions.

Even though the regional and local self-government authorities in Poland are built on the principle of subsidiarity, they are subjected to a consistent national level legislation in the area of social rights. The level of performance of those tasks depends, to a major extent from the priorities defined at local level. The legislation is focused on specifying the framework and areas of competence of particular organizational levels of the state administration, and, to a lesser extent on defining the social rights of the inhabitants. This situation mainly applied to the areas of the broadly defined social services such as are services (nurseries and kindergartens, stationary social assistance homes and home service for the elderly and disabled, labour market services, etc.). The freedom to define social policies at local and regional levels is mainly concentrated around the definition of so-called own tasks of the administration (mandatory and non-mandatory), whose level of performance depends, to a major extent, from the local (and regional) priorities and the amount of financial resources allocated by the self-government authorities, to the performance of particular tasks.

Poland is a large country, with huge geographical diversification in terms of level of economic development and intensity and nature of social problems. The relatively high level of freedom in defining local and regional social policy may support adaptation of those policies to the specific local and regional circumstances. On the other hand, obviously, it may lead to an increase in differentiation of accessibility and quality of benefits and services. More particularly, it may hamper implementation of national-level strategies aimed at preventing social exclusion¹⁸.

The possibilities of policy coordination depend, to a major extent from the understanding and openness to partnership and co-operation, both between particular institutions carrying out sectoral policies in chosen region and also between particular levels of the field administration.

The issue of social policy management in Poland, under the current state administration decentralization has not yet obtained a comprehensive political interpretation. However, in preparation to the NAP Inclusion government had noticed the issue of social policy coordination. In the new Act on social assistance, passed in 2004, the local and regional self-government institutions at all levels, have been committed to develop social policy strategies for their regions.

The new legislation is obliging communities [*gminas*] to:

¹⁸ See also: W. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska et al, *Lokalna polityk wobec biedy* [Local policy on poverty], Instytut Socjologii Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2003.

- Develop and carry out community strategies for resolution of social problems, with particular focus on social assistance programmes, prevention, resolution of alcohol problems and others, aiming at integration of people and families from the special risk groups,

District authorities [*poviat* level] shall be obliged to:

- Develop and carry out regional strategies for resolution of social problems, with particular focus on social assistance programmes, support to the disabled and other people, aiming at integration of people and families from the special risk groups,
- Consult the strategy with the communities [*gminas*] within the district [*poviat*],

Regional authorities [*voivodship*] shall be obliged to:

- Develop, update and carry out a voivodship strategy covering social exclusion prevention programmes, equal opportunity for the disabled, prevention and resolution of alcohol problems and collaboration with NGO organizations
- Consultation of the strategy with the districts [*poviats*] located within the voivodship¹⁹.

In the first report from 2004, we have pointed out problems related to the coordination of social policies at different levels of administration. It was too early then to evaluate efficiency of the newly implemented legislation. The report pointed out barriers related to the new legal solutions²⁰

Studies carried out in selected regions, communities and *poviats* have confirmed some of the conclusions presented in the earlier reports.

While most of the local and regional governments have approved the strategies on social problems, the impact of the strategies on better coordination is difficult to estimate. The strategies often lack on proper diagnosis, only a few of them include a schedule of activities with a list of institutions responsible for their performance, rarely they presented a system for performance monitoring of the strategy (a system of performance indicators) and reporting.. One can therefore expect that at least some of those documents were developed rather for formal compliance with regulatory obligations than for establishing a tool to implement social policy at local level.

¹⁹ See Act dated March 12, 2004 on social assistance

²⁰ Those barriers include:

- Insufficiently precise statements in the bill, failing to provide a clear definition of strategy or principles of strategy development, nor applicable tools and deadlines.
- Lack of adequate tools for horizontal integration of the policy,
- Weakness of the social assistance institutions, which in practice become responsible for the development of the strategy.

It is also striking that those documents are rather presenting the perspective of social assistance institutions and their clients, whereas many of the social issues related to social exclusion and resulting challenges go beyond the perspective of social assistance area (i.e. education, health, employment, etc.). There is need for more integrated approach to the topic of social exclusion at local level.

There is a particularly discernible lack of institutional collaboration with the employment offices. Many of the strategies for resolution of social issues do identify the problem of insufficient collaboration between social assistance and labour market institutions. Establishment of such collaboration is seen as one of the priorities²¹. It is further confirmed by the fact that such a collaboration (understood as systematic performance of joint projects) does not exist or is not sufficient.

The lack of horizontal and vertical collaboration of local self-government institutions is also an obstacle for expansion of good solutions and practices and may limit efficiency of social assistance institutions²².

Even though, as it would seem, legislative solutions did not significantly contribute to a better coordination of social policy, some regions are trying to handle this problem on their own. A good example of a consequently implemented policy of “soft” coordination of activities carried out by different levels of self-governments is the warmińsko-mazurskie region. Coordination of the social policy in the warmińsko-mazurskie voivodship is described in more detail in the section 2 of this report. It is based on a set of diverse activities, relying on the principle of partnership.²³ It seems that the experience of the warmińsko-mazurskie region in policy coordination could be applied at national level and in many other regions of Poland.

In the majority of regions covered by the study, there are successful cases of partnerships with NGO organizations. Some of those organizations play a very important role in development of innovative programmes and training initiatives. It is also worth noticing that there are very interesting and innovative programmes aiming at activation of local communities and development of citizen activities for resolution of social issues. Examples of such activities are described in further parts of the report as a good practices.

²¹ See i.e. Social Policy Strategy for the warmińsko-mazurskie voivodship until 2015.

²² See description of the Consultation Point for Victims of Violence in Family in Przasnysz, described further in this report.

²³ See the detailed description of the social policy coordination mechanism applied in the warmińsko-mazurski region, further in this report.

Przasnysz

General information

Przasnysz is a small town located in the northern part of Mazovia region. It is at the same time the seat of community [*gmina*] authorities and of district [*powiat*] administration, covering also the rural communes in the vicinity of the town. The area in which the town is located is typically agricultural. Przasnysz itself has a population of approximately 18,000.

In the years 1999-2002 there was an increase of unemployment in Przasnysz district, same as in the entire region. In 2003-2004 the unemployment rate levelled off. In the last months of 2005 a drop was noted in the number of unemployed.

The unemployed registered in the County Labour Office at the end of July 2005 represented 21.4% of active population (a year earlier 23.2%), whereas the rate of registered unemployment for the whole Mazovia region at that moment was 14.4%. Only 11% of all unemployed were entitled to draw unemployment benefits. Difficulties in finding work are encountered mostly by people with low vocational qualifications. Unemployed without secondary education accounted for more than two-thirds of all unemployed. More than half of the unemployed registered in Przasnysz district were looking for work longer than 12 months, including nearly 40% more than two years²⁴.

Concern is raised by the fact that nearly a third of all the unemployed registered in Przasnysz district were people under 24 years of age – current or recent graduates of various types of schools. As a rule these people have not so far held any jobs, hence the impossibility of getting it now, considering the ever higher qualifications demanded (each year ever more young people with higher education background come on the market). The situation leads to anger and frustration, which with time turn to apathy and inability to do anything constructive. A vicious circle develops, where the lack of a job prevents accumulating experience, and lack of experience becomes a barrier to finding a job.

Poverty is the main reason for providing welfare assistance in the town of Przasnysz. This, however, is a very broad term which is not just the reason for providing assistance but also the consequence of other factors causing people to turn to social assistance institutions for aid. The most critical social problem in the town and district of Przasnysz is unemployment. Most of the people encompassed by social assistance are families with children (60% of beneficiaries).

Many families in Przasnysz are ineffective in exercising their roles. The reason behind such non-functionality is usually the absolute erosion of marital bonds, non-lasting informal

²⁴ Labour market situation in Przasnysz county as of August 31, 2005. County Labour Office in Przasnysz..

partnerships with resulting frequent change of partners. Often members of pathological families in which the appropriate, correct norms and hierarchy of values have failed to evolve, duplicate the types of behaviour which they have learned in their own family homes.

Duplicating undesirable social behaviour by persons supported with social assistance benefits leads to helplessness in family care and upbringing questions. Persons who have not had the appropriate behaviour models in their own family homes are most often incapable of behaving correctly themselves in their own adult life, and most often react to crisis situations with physical and mental violence. Crisis situations in the family reflect negatively both on relations within that family and relations with the outside world. The factor triggering a crisis can be, for instance, unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, violence. Crisis-supporting factors are also often the consequences of a crisis which developed in a family – it could be that alcoholism and violence leading to a crisis are exacerbated because of the crisis. One of the clearest manifestations of a crisis situation is **violence in the family**. It takes on the shape of mental coercion or physical violence, though most often the two go together²⁵.

Equalization of educational opportunities for children and youth.

Up to 2003 the only form of assistance to school attendees and university students in the town and district of Przasnysz were the scholarships awarded by the State Treasury Agricultural Property Agency (AWRSP) to school and university students from families of unemployed former workers of state owned farms. New regulations on financial assistance to students financed by state budget and launching scholarships programs for students of secondary schools and university students from rural and marginalised areas, financed by ESF, considerably improved the capacity for financially supporting young people gaining education.

The program of financial assistance to school attendees and university students financed with ESF resources was extended during the 2004/2005 school year to 657 secondary school students and 61 university-level students²⁶. Due to shortages in the financial sources the income threshold for secondary school students was decreased from PLN 504 (per capita) to PLN 350. The secondary school students living in the town of Przasnysz had to be excluded from the program, due to program eligibility criteria. This results in dissatisfaction and lack of understanding among students from poor families resident in Przasnysz, often attending the same schools as the young people receiving such scholarship assistance²⁷. The program was launched with considerable delay, which prevented all applicants to benefit from possible

²⁵ See: *Analysis of Social Problems in Przasnysz District*. District Centre for Assistance to Family, Przasnysz 2005.[in Polish],

²⁶ Data of Przasnysz District Office.

²⁷ Program is addressed to young people from impoverished families, living in rural areas or in towns up to 5 thousand inhabitants.

assistance. The procedure for awarding assistance is very complicated and creates the administrative difficulties both for the persons covered by assistance and for the administration managing the program. There are considerably fewer complications in managing the program of scholarship assistance to university-level students²⁸.

Since June 2005 Przasnysz is also implementing a program of assistance to primary and post-primary school attendees financed out of the state budget. The program encompassed 441 children. The average amount of the scholarship comes down to refund of the costs incurred by a family in connection with education of their children. Since the assistance is addressed to children from very poor families, there are often problems for the families to advance the funds before receiving a refund²⁹.

Financial assistance for people living in poverty.

Adoption of the new Social Assistance Act improved the financial situation of social assistance in Przasnysz. In the years 2001 – 2003 the funds allocated from state budget for periodical allowance were considerably lower than needs. In effect there was a sharp decline in the number of people awarded entitlement to assistance and shortening of periods for which benefit entitlement was awarded. In 2004 the total funds transferred by state budget and the municipality for payment of support were much higher than in the preceding years, allowing for extension of assistance to a large number of the needy. Thanks to the transfer from the municipality, the amount of the support payment amounted to some ½ of the individual poverty gap, and was well above the minimum required by law³⁰ (see: Table 1)

Table 1. Periodical social assistance allowance in the municipality of Przasnysz, 2000-2005.

Year	Number of people awarded benefit entitlement	Funds expended (PLN '000)	Average amount of benefit (PLN)	Average term of benefit payment during the year
2000	275	228.1	225.4	6 months
2001	32	14.5	206.6	2 months
2002	23	14.1	201.4	2 months
2003	50	12.4	248.9	2 months
2004	152	90.6 (of that	231.2	6 months

²⁸ Assistance program for secondary school attendees is based on refunds of eligible documented costs, defined in refund rules adopted by schools. Financial assistance to university-level students is direct, not based on refund principle.

²⁹ Information of Przasnysz Municipal Office.

³⁰ Minimum equals 1/5 of individual poverty gap (see: Social Assistance Act).

		municipality funds - 58.7)		
2005, Jan. - June półrocze	101	69.7 (of that municipality funds - 32.7)	246.4	6 months

Source: Information of Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Przasnysz.

Social services. Care for elderly and disabled.

The Social Assistance Centre in Przasnysz for several years has been making efforts to keep the people requiring constant care in their regular home environment, and to ensure their social integration. To this end a Community Self-Aid Centre was formed for mentally handicapped people and special at-home services were developed for the mentally ill. Young people from Przasnysz schools have been recruited on the voluntary basis to the project. Thanks to organising cultural events with participation of the people to whom the project is addressed, considerable progress has been achieved in gaining acceptance and understanding of the town's population for problems faced by the mentally handicapped. One significant effect of the efforts was to achieve the continued stay in their home environment by many of the handicapped requiring permanent care, and increasing the level of their self-reliance and activity.

Social Assistance Act introduces new regulations regarding financing of stationary social assistance homes for people requiring constant external assistance with the aim to reduce demand for stationary forms of care and developing of nursing and care services which would allow the people requiring permanent assistance to continue living in their own home and family environment³¹.

The impact of the new regulations in Przasnysz is difficult to assess at the moment. However, we can not observe along with the new regulations increase in demand for care services to be provided at home. Some people and families, while resigning from services in social assistance stationary homes often apply for places in palliative care wards of hospitals financed through the National Health Fund, where the stay is almost free for the patient, her or his family and for the commune involved. Hence the unexpected effect of changed regulations was to shift demand from payable to free forms of stationary nursing care.

³¹ Starting from 2005, the cost of stay in stationary social assistance home is borne successively by: the patient staying in home up to 70% of her or his income, family of the patient staying in such a home when the family income exceed the statutory poverty line by 250%, and the commune (Social Assistance Act of March 12, 2004).

Activation and integration of groups threatened with social exclusion.

The Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Przasnysz has several types of projects aimed at social integration of the beneficiaries of the social assistance. These are: social work on the basis of a social contract, volunteer services, actions against violence in the family and actions on behalf of mentally handicapped and mentally ill people.

a) Social Contract

Social work is the prime mission of social assistance, with the aim of having the persons and families, to whom help is provided, regain the capability of functioning in the society, including reestablishment of economic independence. One method of social work is a social contract between the individual recipient or recipient family and a social worker. Prior to 2004, social contracts were occasionally resorted to by social workers as an instrument bolstering social work, with no underlying statutory regulations. Under the now applicable Social Assistance Act, social contracts have gained statutory recognition as ‘a written contract concluded with a person applying for assistance, defining the rights and obligations of parties to the contract in the joint effort to overcome a difficult life situation of a person or family.’³²

The Municipal Social Assistance Centre proceeded to implement the principle of social contracts already before entry into force of the new Social Assistance Act. Actions to enhance occupational activity have been launched with 12 families (20 persons). The contract specified weekly meetings with the social worker to review the job offers notified by the Labour Office, assistance in writing CVs and motivation letters to employers and help in getting ready for the interview with employers. At the same time, the persons encompassed by the project have been guaranteed further assistance in situations of taking up a job, so the work would mean increased total income. The efforts resulted in two people getting jobs, and in the remaining cases, as a result of frequent contacts with the social worker and his efforts, the people regained self-confidence and took a more active stance in their daily lives. Actions to use social contracts as a regular method of social work have also been taken by the Social Assistance Centre in commune Przasnysz, which covers the rural commune surrounding the town of Przasnysz. Still, that Centre encountered major problems in appropriate application of that instrument. This is linked to the fact of a heavy work load of the social workers and weakness of infrastructure (the Centre has only 2 social workers and serve a population of 7600 in the commune under its jurisdiction, plus only a single room where 4 permanent staff have to do their work while the welfare recipients are being received by the social workers), and otherwise insufficient preparedness to carry out the task. Experience of the town and

³² Social Assistance Act, Article 6 section 6.

commune of Przasnysz points to limitations connected with the chance for extending such actions on a wider scale. It appears that use of social contracts as an instrument of social work requires good preparation of social workers, including in particular the skill for carrying out in-depth analyses of situations in which the persons and families covered by the contract have found themselves, and the skill to work jointly with the charges. In addition, there is a need for support from broadly defined social infrastructure (appropriate premises, the required number of social workers who could devote their time to really doing the social work with the persons and families concerned, psychotherapy centres, psychological counselling, etc.) The success of this approach will to a large extent be a function of good preparation and knowledge of social workers and appropriate selection of persons to which this instrument would be applied. Failure to meet these conditions could result in low success rate of efforts, with consequent disillusionment of the persons, to whom this form of social work would be applied and the involved social workers themselves.

Ministry of Social Policy has recently instituted monitoring of usage of social contracts as a method of social work. Unfortunately, these focus only on quantitative aspects – the number of social contracts concluded, without looking into the wider aspects of the environment in which such tasks are to be carried out. This could, in effect, result in speeding up the move to concluding social contracts without the appropriate conditions and preparation for their proper implementation, and in consequence actually diminish the effectiveness of social contracts as a tool for mobilising welfare assistance recipients.

b) Good practice: Program on Voluntary work of the Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Przasnysz³³

The Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Przasnysz is taking actions to mobilise the local community and partnership going beyond statutory requirements. Since 2002 it has been carrying out a professionally conceived project to promote voluntary work. The rising problems linked with violence in the family have also encouraged the Centre to launch actions aimed at countering such phenomena.

Volunteer Centre

The idea of setting up a program on voluntary work in the Centre came up after several successful projects carried out with assistance of young people in the Community Self-Help Centre for mentally handicapped people. The Centre relied on experience of other social assistance centres and got a substantive support of the Volunteer Centre in Warsaw. The

³³ More on the subject in: Joanna Cieślak, Wolontariat w Ośrodku Pomocy Społecznej, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Instytut Profilaktyki Społecznej i Resocjalizacji, manuscript.

objective behind developing a volunteer movement was to improve social services, mobilise the local community and to meet the needs of people wishing to devote their time to others.

Formation of the program was preceded with diagnosis of demand for volunteer work³⁴. The scope of volunteer work was defined (help in doing homework, indicating the right behaviour models, conducting talks with charges about their family problems, spending leisure time together, help in minor household chores, facilitating contacts with the community, counteracting the sense of being deserted.)

Program co-ordinators were appointed, with responsibility for program implementation, execution and evaluation. Collaboration on the program was proposed also to teachers from Przasnysz schools. In order to avoid having social workers feel threatened by having volunteers as “competitors”, the former have been informed about the differences between the tasks of volunteers and the range of services provided by the Centre, and about the methods and forms of working together with the volunteers. Those willing to take up volunteer work have been sought out in contact with schools, in the form of leaflets and through contacts with the media. The volunteers go through training provided by specialists and learned about volunteer work rules, and the description of their rights and obligations.

Persons requiring the assistance of volunteers have to agree with the co-ordinators the modalities and forms of support. The co-ordinators also coach and instruct the volunteers in their tasks and in detail set out their duties. A co-ordinator monitors also the program, through contacts with the recipients to ascertain whether the work of the volunteer is carried out appropriately, and supports the volunteers in resolving issues connected with their work.

An important role in the volunteer program is played by undertakings serving to reward the services. There are Volunteer Worker Days, excursions, meetings with local authorities, congratulatory letters to school boards. On concluding their participation in the program, the volunteers receive a certificate of volunteer work.

Since 2002, the program expanded, attracting ever larger number of volunteers and widening the scope of their services. In the school year 2004/2005 the program had 83 volunteers, of that 67 school attendees, 6 university-level students, 2 working people, 1 retired person and 7 unemployed.

The program is addressed to three groups of recipients: children with problems at school, handicapped children and the elderly.

Thanks to the program, positive effects were noted in education of children, social integration of the mentally handicapped, their self-reliance and acceptance in the community at large,

³⁴ The needs were identified working jointly with schools, the social therapy facility, Society of Families and Friends of Addicted Children “Return From U” (‘U’ being the first letter of Polish word for addiction) and information from welfare centres about the number of elderly, ill and handicapped people.

lessening the sense of desertion and helplessness of persons and families covered by the program. The program also radiates to mobilise and integrate the local community and to shape pro-social attitudes of young people taking part in the program.

c) Preventing violence in the family.

Lack of integration in actions of various local institutions to counter violence in the family has in many cases resulted in lack of required response by the institutions responsible, leaving the victims of violence without support. There was agreement on the need for a comprehensive approach, co-operation and open communication between the various institutions and organisations acting in this area. In April 2005 the Municipal Social Assistance Centre and the Police Headquarters have formed the “Przasnysz Coalition Against Violence in the Family”. The coalition associates 17 entities – institutions which, as part of their responsibilities, either tackle or meet with problems of violence in the family: social assistance institutions, prosecutor’s office and the police, NGOs, schools, etc.

The coalition forms an interdisciplinary team of specialists in the various areas, whose responsibilities cover tasks of countering violence and professional assistance to victims of violence at home. This is also a dedicated group, which not only introduces the intervention standards developed through experience, but also acts as public lobby for countering violence at home and for minimising its negative consequences³⁵.

The short track record of the Coalition notwithstanding, some of its objectives have been met already: training was carried out for 40 people on anti-violence coalition building; lodging facilities have been arranged for victims of violence; an assistance-intervention team was formed, to diagnose the situation of specific families touched by violence and formulate

³⁵

Coalition objectives cover:

- Developing a system of co-operation between various institutions in the area of violence at home;
- Setting up assistance-intervention teams (police officer, social worker, pedagogue, therapy psychologist);
- Developing a model for interventions;
- Keeping relevant documentation of individual intervention – assistance cases and the effects of these actions;
- Setting up a data base of families touched by violence;
- Raising staff qualifications regarding home violence (training cycle for coalition participants);
- Setting up a Consultation Point for Victims of Violence at Home;
- Setting up support groups for victims of violence at home;
- Setting up social therapy rooms in primary schools, supplementing school curriculums with education on the phenomenon of violence;
- Setting up lodging facilities for victims of violence at home, to be later transformed into Crisis Intervention Centre;
- Carried out extensive campaigns in the media, on both the rights of persons who suffer as a result of violence and actions taken in this respect.(see: Action Plan of Przasnysz Coalition Against Violence in the Family, manuscript [in Polish])

dedicate action plans for each case. A social worker of the Centre, with consent of the violence victims, provides intensive services to such people. In September 2005 a Consultation Point for Victims of Violence in Family has been set up, with a social worker, police officer, lawyer, therapy psychologist for family violence on duty.

Problems in co-ordinating policies and mobilising the relevant institutions.

Efforts of the Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Przasnysz undoubtedly can serve as an example of well organised and professionally conceived actions to aid excluded persons and to activate the local community. Thanks to its local community initiatives, the Centre has also gained the acceptance and support of local institutions, which allowed for building up partnership and co-operation. It is also the unique focal point for the entire county in terms of novel undertakings. The potential of experience gained and initiatives launched could certainly be used to the benefit of the entire Przasnysz district.

In practice, the opportunities to apply the experience and extend actions to cover the entire territory of the county are limited. In addition to institutional constraints (most commune social assistance centres in Przasnysz county lack sufficient premises and have too few social workers in their staffs), there is an evident absence of co-ordination and exchange of experience between the Przasnysz Centre and other facilities in the county. The County Centre for Assistance to the Family also does not play a co-ordinating role. This is in part due to the division of responsibilities in the area of social assistance, assigned as part of state administration reform to each level of self-government administration³⁶. A specific example of the constraints posed by lack of co-operation mechanisms are the efforts of the Consultation Point for Victims of Violence at Home operated by the municipal Social Assistance Centre in Przasnysz. During its short operation, people from communes adjoining the town of Przasnysz got the assistance from the Consulting Point, but they could not join a more comprehensive program, as formed by the Coalition Against Violence in the Family in town Przasnysz.

A major constraint is the lack of proper co-operation between the social assistance network and the County Labour Office. The specific division of responsibilities and absence of co-operation between labour market and social assistance institutions, common in most regions around Poland, causes that vocational activation of people long-term excluded from the labour market fails to find the appropriate institutional support.

It is also worth mentioning the vital role played by non-government organisations in promoting and professionally supporting efforts of the Municipal Social Assistance Centre.

³⁶ Under this division of responsibilities, county administration is not responsible for promoting and disseminating actions nor for their co-ordination at county level.

Both the volunteer program and program of actions against violence in the family have been formulated with the use of expertise, experience and training provided by such organisations³⁷.

³⁷ This holds particularly for the Biuro Obsługi Ruchu Inicjatyw Społecznych [Management Bureau of Social Initiatives Movement] and Centrum Wolontariatu [Volunteer Movement Centre].

Radom

General Information

The city of Radom located in the Mazovia Region is a typical industrial centre which, due to closure of traditional industries during the transformation period and a relatively low level of educational level of population is now suffering from severe process of degradation, in civilisation terms, and rising social problems. The city has a population of 230 000. A particularly worrying development is the high unemployment continuing practically from the first years of transformation. The registered unemployment rate for Radom city came to 27% in June 2005 (for the country as a whole 18%, and for Mazovia Region 14%), but was lower than a year earlier. High unemployment entails many negative social phenomena, such as poverty, homelessness, addictions, violence, crime, loss of sense of security and helplessness in life, social tensions, deteriorating health.

The dominant group among the jobless are the long-term unemployed, who lost their entitlement to unemployment allowance (some 84% of all unemployed have no allowance entitlement). Persons out of work for more than 12 months make up 70% of unemployed. The characteristic trait of Radom unemployed is their low level of education and lack of qualifications, which make finding work more difficult.

The unfavourable situation on the Radom labour market, pauperisation of city inhabitants, mounting social problems cause that an increasing number of people in Radom cannot cope on their own with meeting their basic life needs and addressing daily problems. Given this, with each year there has been a systematic increase in the number of customers of the Municipal Social Assistance Centre. The main title to assistance is due to unemployment (82% of the people receiving aid).

Equalization of educational opportunities for children and youth.

The scholarship assistance schemes for students from poor families initiated during the school year of 2004/2005 contributed to a significant increase in assistance opportunities. No scholarship assistance programmes for youth originating from poor families and financed from public funds have been granted in Radom, until 2005³⁸. However, the programs are lacking on sufficient financial sources, and complicated procedures could constrain access of students to the financial support.

³⁸ The exception being scholarship schemes rewarding good results in education and sport achievements.

Under the new regulations of the educational bill, approximately 7,100 six-month scholarships were granted in Radom during the school year of 2004/2005, amounting to approximately PLN 45 per month (based on an income threshold criterion of PLN 316). Over 7,300 applications have been submitted for school year 2005/2006, but the payments have not yet been initiated. Both in 2004/2005 and this year, the state budget funds are not sufficient to cover the needs, therefore the Radom municipality has supplemented the scholarship fund from its own resources. Despite that, not all the students meeting qualification criteria will be able to obtain support.

The ESF co-financed programme has paid scholarships to 1,569 students whose per capita income in the family did not exceed PLN 350 per month (140 students resigned from the scholarship during the programme). The scholarship amounted to PLN 150 per month. The long procedures for initiation of the support and the terms of expense refunds resulted in some of the students being unable to cover for the related expenses "in advance."

Scholarship assistance for students in the academic year of 2004/2005 has covered 330 people, having a per capita income below the PLN 350 per month threshold. In the academic year of 2005/2006, 132 people have been qualified to scholarship assistance.

Financial assistance for people living in poverty.

For over ten years, the demand for social assistance benefits in Radom is very high. Due to the difficult economic situation, many people and families cannot cope with satisfying the basic needs and require external support. The number of people requiring assistance grew steadily between 1998 and 2003. The growth trend in numbers of Municipal Social Assistance Centre beneficiaries continuing since 1999 was checked in 2004. For the first time since 5 years, a meaningful decline was registered in the number of social assistance benefits recipients. Compared with 2003, the number of families drawing social assistance benefits declined by more than 1.700, or some 14%. The main reason behind this were the legislative changes leading to extracting some of the benefits from the system of social assistance and shifting them to the system of family benefits, with the latter paid out in 2004 to between 12.000 and 12.500 people each month and taking over the payment of social pensions by ZUS, the Social Insurance Administration. In 2004, the number of people receiving social assistance benefits came to more than 10.000 (representing 16.000 people in total) or close to 14% of the city population³⁹.

The funds for social assistance distributed by the city of Radom in the years 1999-2003 were provided for the most part from the central budget and to a much lesser extent by the city budget. For some years now their amount was insufficient and did not cover the ascertained

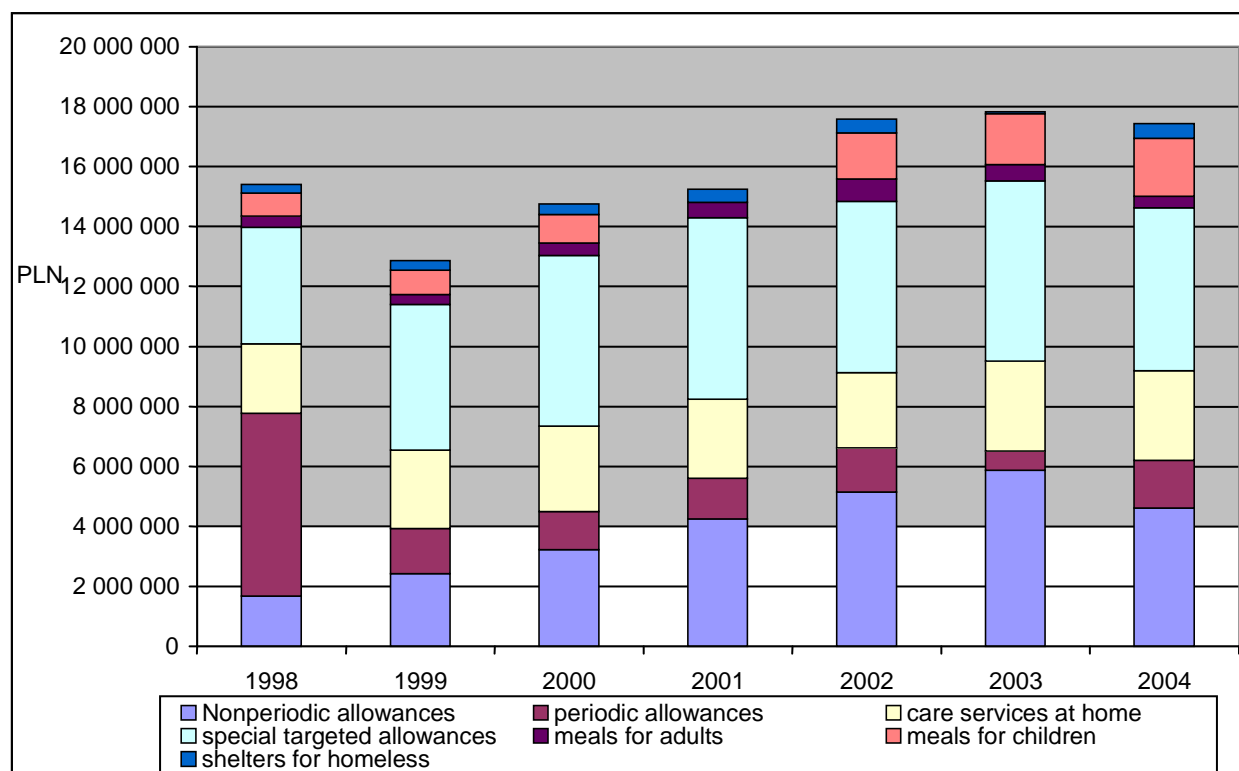
³⁹ Table 2. Number of social welfare beneficiaries in the city of Radom, 1998-2004.

Year	Number of families drawing welfare benefits	Number of persons drawing welfare benefits
1998	9.814	11.835
1999	9.349	11.849
2000	10.408	12.350
2001	11.498	13.582
2002	12.004	14.024
2003	12.526	14.927
2004	10.753	16.553

Source: *Report on Execution of Social Assistance Tasks in Radom 2004*, Municipal Social Assistance Centre, Radom 2005, [in Polish].

needs. In the years 1999 – 2002 these funds increased each year, but since 2003 were again reduced. This held also for 2004, when the funds earmarked for social assistance were reduced due to curtailment of social assistance tasks and the ways in which they were to be financed. As evident from Figure 1 the funds allocated for the various social assistance tasks in the years 1998-2004 changed each year. There was a regular increase in the funding for nonperiodical benefits paid to people who, due to age or disability were incapable to do any work and had no living sources of their own, or their income was below the poverty line as defined for social assistance purposes. In contrast. the funds earmarked for periodical allowances for persons (and families) in temporarily difficult circumstances oscillated each year. Such allowances provide the prime form of financial support for the unemployed who have lost their entitlement to an unemployment allowance. Notwithstanding the increased overall unemployment in Radom and the larger number of long-term unemployed, no longer eligible for unemployment allowance the funds allocated from the state budget⁴⁰ for this group of beneficiaries have been significantly curtailed compared with 1998. As a result of changes in the manner of financing such benefits starting from May 2004⁴¹, there was a slight increase in the amount of resources available for financial assistance to persons and families in temporary difficulties, but they are still far insufficient to cover needs in this respect.

Figure 1. Expenditure on specific program of the social assistance in Radom in 1998-2004.



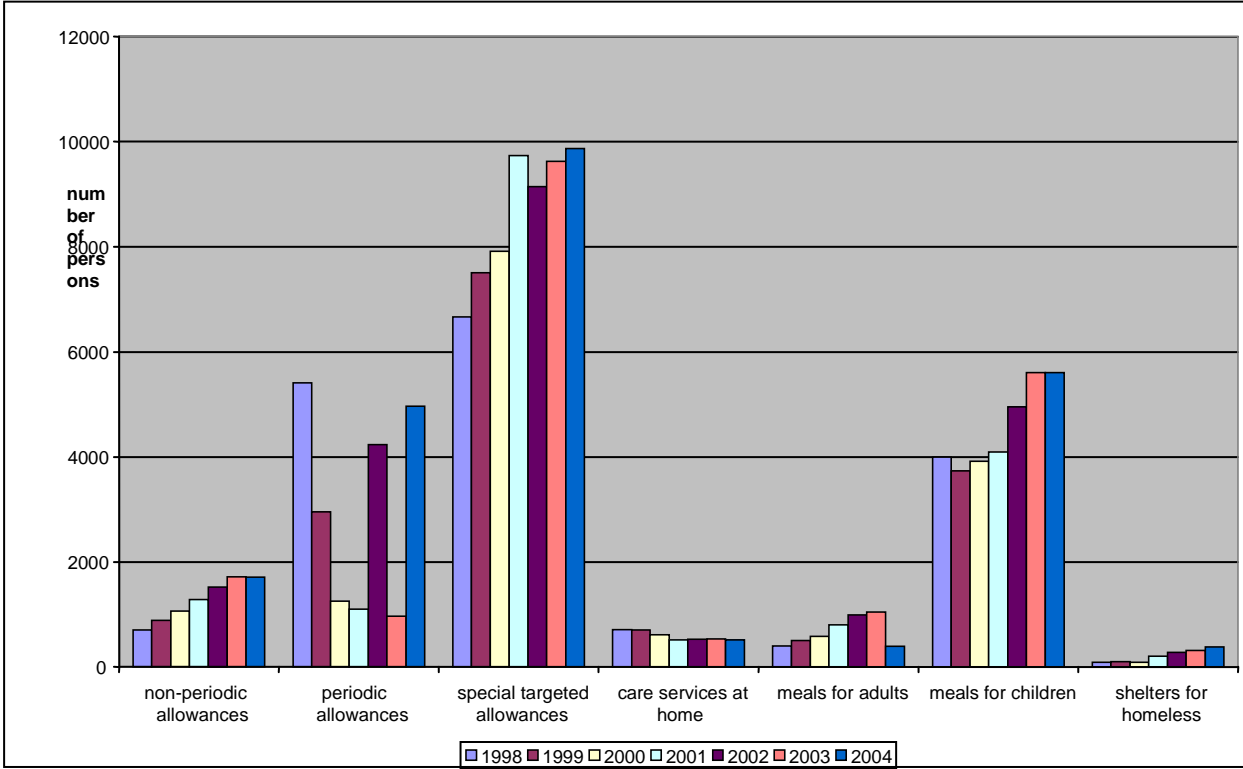
Source: Own calculations based on: *Report on Execution of Social Assistance Tasks in Radom 2004*, Municipality Social Assistance Centre, Radom 2005, [in Polish].

⁴⁰ Until 2003 they were financed entirely through the state budget

⁴¹ Since May 2004 financing of these benefits has been taken over by local self-governments. The state budget guarantees only the minimum, mandatory amount of allowance equal to 20% of the individual poverty gap

Changes in financial capacities of the social assistance in Radom resulted in major oscillations in the number of people receiving the various types of benefits. This was particularly true of beneficiaries drawing periodic allowances (see: Figure 2)

Figure 2. Number of beneficiaries of benefits and services receiving social assistance paid by Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Radom.



Source: See Figure 1.

For the last few years in view of problems with financing social assistance tasks in Radom, periodic allowances were very low and paid out for very short periods. Since 1999, the payment of periodic allowances for 1 to 3 months became the norm. Starting with 2004, along with change in the Social Assistance Act, periodic allowance has been made a mandatory benefit and became a so-called own task of communes. Still in view of the limited financial capacities of the commune and giving benefit entitlement to a larger number of people the allowance is paid in the lowest amount possible under law and totally financed out of the state budget. The average amount of a periodic allowance in 2004 came to only PLN 81 (paid for 4 month), while in 2003 such allowances have been paid out for an average of 2.5 months in amounts equal to approximately PLN 250. (see: Table 3).

Table 3. Average amount and duration of selected allowances, 1998 – 2004

	TARGETTED ALLOWANCES		PERIODIC ALLOWANCES	
	Average duration	Average amount	Average duration	Average amount
1998	3.5 months	164.00	5.6 months	200.00
1999	4.8 months	135.00	2.1 months	251.00
2000	5.9 months	121.00	3.8 months	264.00
2001	6.5 months	106.00	2.2 months	290.00
2002	6.5 months	96.30	1.9 months	185.78
2003	7.8 months	80.00	2.5 months	257.50
2004	7.5 months	73.00	3.9 months	81.30

Source: see Figure 1

In 2005 the situation of social assistance in Radom improved slightly. Periodic allowances are paid out starting January, in contrast to earlier years, when they have been paid out in the last 3 – 4 months of a year. In addition, their amount increased from 20% to 25% of the benefit due. It is to be noted, however, that periodic allowances are paid out, same as in 2004, only in the minimum statutory amount which is secured by funds transfer from the state budget.

Strategy for resolving social problems.

As required under provisions of the new Social Assistance Act, in 2005 Radom adopted a Strategy for Resolving Social Problems covering 2005-2010. The Strategy, based on detailed and frank analysis of the city's social problems, only partly reflects the aims set out in NAP Inclusion. It seems that it was the existing legal regulations (including legislative changes covered in NAP Inclusion), earlier practical experiences, identification of needs along with capacity for their satisfaction which more than NAP Inclusion itself shaped the direction of the adopted Strategy. The Radom Strategy largely represents continuation and extension of the earlier social assistance formula, which aimed above all at social integrating excluded persons and families and containing the negative consequences of emerging social problems. Considerable stress was placed in the strategy on securing the material resources for meeting the basic living needs of people and families. This is understandable, since as shown in the Report on execution of social assistance tasks in 2004, the problem of shortage of funds to a large extent limits the effectiveness of social welfare actions⁴².

⁴² 'It has to be stated frankly' wrote authors of the report ' that non-financial forms of assistance by themselves will not address the problems. They are important, but only in supportive capacity. People and families must have ensured funds for meeting their basic life needs, or must have such conditions created, that they will be able to secure such funds on their own (improved labour market situation). Without this, we will witness ever deeper pauperisation of the city's populace, which in turn could lead to disintegration of families, „flourishing of pathological phenomena

In addition, the strategy places stress on social and vocational activation of people and families socially excluded or in danger of such exclusion, on mobilising local communities through the Centre for Local Activation (CLA) program, and supporting families in carrying out their functions as well as assisting non-functional families.

Radom authorities have considerable successes with programs of mobilising local communities, on partnership basis. Continuation and extension of such actions are among the priorities in the adopted Strategy.

Activation and integration of groups threatened with social exclusion.

Since the time of public administration reform in 1999, social assistance in Radom has been facing ever more serious problems – on the one hand, the number of tasks to be carried out increases, and on the other hand, the available financial resources were no match to the magnitude of actual needs. The large number and complexity of social problems required and continues to require from welfare to provide not only expedient financial assistance, but also to take actions preventing exclusion. One of the greatest constraints in functioning of welfare assistance was the application by social workers of only one method of working – working individually with each case. The method did not match the real needs of the city in which the scale of social problems grew out of proportion to capabilities of the Social Assistance Centre. Social assistance executed all tasks connected with provision of financial assistance (within the limit of available funds), but in terms of social work it lacked visible results. The program Centre for Local Activity was developed to address that situation.

a) Good practice Centre for Local Activity in Radom

CLA

In the year 2000 the Municipal Social Assistance Centre acceded to the Centre for Local Activity (CLA) program. CLA is a good example of applying group and community method of social work and partnership⁴³. The CLA Program is not a new organisation, but a set approach which, in most general terms, calls for mobilising local communities, with the final objective of:

starting with all types of addictions all the way to crime. Furthermore, it is to be noted that development of non-financial forms of assistance also requires given financial outlays, for such things as the necessary hiring of specialists, organising training, commuting to training, securing catering for the customers participating in group events, securing own share of funding required in launching all types of projects'. (Report on Execution of Social Assistance Tasks in 2004).

⁴³ Program CLA Centre for Local Activity was initiated in 1997 by BORIS Association – Service Bureau of Social Initiatives Movement, which currently co-ordinates its execution in the Mazovia Region.

National-level co-ordination is carried out by the Association Centre for Support for Local Activity CLA in radom., which is also responsible for its development and promotion, preparation of training materials an implementation in other Regions.

- forming integrated local communities;
- developing local solidarity and self-aid ties;
- mobilising self-government communities;
- building up the identity of local communities.

The most important feature of the CAL program is that any initiatives launched under the program respond to specific needs raised by local communities and are carried out relying on these communities' own human and institutional resources, according to the idea „let us help people help themselves”. None of the institutions and organisations working by the CLA method limit their activeness to just one demographic group (such as children, women, the elderly) or one area of action (such as welfare assistance, schooling, culture or sports).

One of the prime precepts in working by the CLA method is to set up a real, physical place to be used for integrating a local community, hence it became necessary to secure new premises for several social work regions, located close to the place where they operate. In 2004 Radom had 10 social work regions, well equipped for carrying out any community initiatives, including halls for meetings of local activity teams and self-help groups. During the first four years of program operation new social worker teams have been set up, management of social projects was decentralised, intensive training has been provided in resources identification, building up social activeness, initiating self-help movements, designing social projects and new methods for employee assessment have been implemented. Under the umbrella of Centre for Local Activity, various programs are being carried out to address needs of local communities.

Established by the program **The Citizen Information Point** is providing more than 2,500 consultations per year. Among other activities within the CLA Programme, social workers have initiated more than 170 different types of groups, attended by over 2,100 people, mainly beneficiaries of the Municipal Social Assistance Centre. These are people from the special risk group and people threatened with social exclusion. The activities of CLA included:

Support groups, aimed more particularly at the long-term unemployed, single mothers, families with disabled children. Their goal was to reinforce those people in their strive to overcome difficulties, help them regaining self-confidence and feeling of self-worthiness (a total of 57 such groups have been initiated),

Citizen groups carrying out resolution of local problems, mainly caring for the aesthetics of housing environments and organization of free time activities for children and youth (a total of 68 such groups have been initiated),

Educational groups aimed mainly at the unemployed, incomplete families, children from replacement families and orphanages. They aimed at increasing their skills in the areas of

active search of employment, household budget management, official and administrative procedures, child care, health and hygiene (a total of 34 groups).

The Centre is also operating a **Volunteer Club "Friends"** with over 450 members (over 200 people in 2004). The volunteers were and are mainly people, who are persistently unemployed and beneficiaries of the Centre. Working for others helps them rebuilding their self-confidence and self-evaluation. Including this group in voluntary work is considered to be one of the best methods to enhance their activity. The volunteers, members of the Club:

- Provide support to individual people and families, i.e. by helping children with school homework, babysitting, caring of disabled people, helping with official proceedings, taking lonely elderly people for walks,
- Walk children across streets – as part of the Safe Crossing to School programme,
- Help in running foyers, clubs, educational equalization sessions, information points, self-assessment groups.

It also organizes a wide variety of integration events (200 events in 2000 – 2004): fairs, picnics, raids, occasional gatherings, parties, etc.

As part of the CLA Programme, **Radom Integration Forum** was set up in 2003. The objective is to publicise the problems relating to integration of the handicapped people with local communities and initiating the process of dismantling social barriers by involving handicapped people in social activities and enabling them to participate in cultural, educational, sporting and self-help groups.⁴⁴ The Forum managed to bring into its fold representatives of city authorities, non-government organisations and institutions important to Radom: theatres, cultural and educational institutions, housing co-operatives, representatives of sport facilities. The Forum idea, artistic performances and showings of art work by the handicapped have met with considerable interest and appreciation of the general population and city authorities, laying the groundwork for integration efforts.

Program **"Family in overhaul"** is addressed to multi-problem families in crisis. Its execution consists of appointing inter-disciplinary teams to act on the family using various means and

⁴⁴ In Radom this problem touches more than 25000 people, or 11% of the total population. Observations of social workers indicate that persons and families touched by the problem of disability cannot fully participate in social life and exercise their rights, due to architectural and social barriers. This, in effect, results in social exclusion. Even though problems of the handicapped are being addressed by NGOs and local institutions, but their actions are limited to their membership or process participants. There is a lack of partner actions integrating handicapped people from various groups and disabled people living in their homes with the local communities to prevent exclusion. Analysing this, it was accepted that all possible actions should be taken to eliminate barriers, not only architectural, as these are being successively eliminated by municipal authorities, but mainly the social barriers, particularly as architectural barriers concern only people with impaired motional dexterity, and in addition to them there are people with other ailments, such as intellectually handicapped.

building up a support network for the family. Depending on the situation, specialists from various walks are seconded to such teams, such as police officers, education experts, compartment counsellors, curators, psychologists. The team, co-ordinated by the social worker concerned, jointly analyses the situation of the given family, define an action plan and proceed to carry out what each member pledges to do. The final goal of the joint effort is to resolve or at least reduce the gravity of existing problems. The basis on which the program rests is that the families, around which Teams are set up, take an active part in its work as a partner with the same rights as other Team members⁴⁵.

All the activities of the programme are being carried out in collaboration with different partners: self-government and state institutions, NGO's, catholic church, businesses and representatives of the local communities.

b) Social Contract

The social contract has been applied by social workers in Radom, since 1997⁴⁶. In the opinion of the social workers in Radom, the concept of social contract as specified in the new legislation on social assistance is not compliant with the experience to date with implementation of the social contract tool. It seems that the legislator's intent was to apply the social contract as a tool serving comprehensive resolution of problems encountered by families and recipients of social assistance. On the other hand, the experience of the Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Radom indicated that this form of collaboration with the social assistance client may be applied in selected cases with the aim to gradually improve the functioning of the person, correct the drastic lack of required social habits (such as cleaning the apartment, preparation of meals, resolution of educational and upbringing problems). Even more concerning is the fact that the Ministry of Social Affairs has implemented new forms of reporting, covering the number of social contracts concluded by the communal and municipal social assistance centres. It may result in an accelerated expansion of the social contract without adequate infrastructures, resources and preparation and lead to a reduction in its efficiency in activation of its recipients.

⁴⁵ Between January and July 2004 there were 61 teams formed as part of the „Family in Overhaul” program. The teams formed mainly in response to upbringing problems or gross negligence relating to children due most often to alcohol dependency of their parents, their handicaps (disabilities) or lack of relevant models. 21 teams have completed their work: in 9 cases with success, in 12 case in failure (it did not prove possible to resolve the problems at hand and it became necessary to apply to the Family and Care Court for its position regarding incorrect exercise of parental care of their children.

⁴⁶ Since implementation of the resolution on social contracts, social workers In Radom have concluded approximately 400 social contracts. This means that this tool has been applied to about 5% of the community of social assistance recipients.

ion Club

In July 2005, based on the Act on Social Employment, the Municipal Social Assistance Centre in Radom has established the Social Integration Club. The key goal of its activities is the limitation of social exclusion phenomena and preparation of people threatened with social exclusion to participate in social life and return to the labour market. The activities of the Club are carried out based on individual work plans developed for every participant, based on his/her real aptitude and ability, identified in a diagnostic process. The activities of the Club are aimed at:

- Providing individual and group psychological (mental) support, increasing self-assessment and self-confidence, providing participants with knowledge and skill required to handle hardships of every day life, communication, stress resistance, shaping the feeling of responsibility and consciousness,
- Including the beneficiaries into social life and preparing them to take advantage of the available infrastructure,
- Shaping or increasing social activity by undertaking voluntary, citizen, self-assistance activities, mutual exchange of services, etc.,
- Preparation for a return to the labour market through active labour market exploration workshops,
- Developing new skills in computers and individual business administration.

The programme of the Social Integration Club is addressed to people, who:

- ⇒ Are persistently unemployed and registered in the employment office for more than 24 months,
- ⇒ Recipients of social assistance for more than 12 months,
- ⇒ With low vocational qualifications and education attainment (educational level: vocational or lower),
- ⇒ Aged over 35.

The cycle of activities covers approximately 30 persons, who will be covered by the activities of the Club for a period of about nine months. The agenda of activities in the Club includes: diagnosis, psycho-educational activities, participation in self-assistance groups, education, social activity in the local community, investigation of vocational preferences, development of proactive labour-market attitudes, increasing vocational qualifications and popularization of alternative free-time management behaviours. Throughout the programme schedule,

participants may benefit from individual consultations with a psychologist, lawyer, pedagogue, economist, etc.

It is being assumed that those activities will result in reinstatement of active participation in the local community life and return to the labour market.

g-term unemployed persons

Activation of long-term unemployed persons relies mainly on subsidising work (public and intervention works). New regulations on employment introduce clear priorities for the long-term unemployed in access to subsidised jobs, financed with public funds⁴⁷. With the possibility of funding tasks out of ESF, the number of people encompassed by long-term vocational activation programs increased. At the same time there was a clear reduction in allocation of funds from national level (Labour Fund) in activation programs for the long-term unemployed. The share of long-term unemployed in the population of people encompassed by subsidised work programs financed nationally (through the Labour Fund) has been reduced compared with the previous year. In the Radom district there were 800 long-term unemployed in 2003 taking part in subsidised employment programs financed with central funds. In 2004 there were half as many of such unemployed involved in these programs. In Radom during 2004 some 2/5 of the people employed in intervention works and 1/3 of the people employed in public works represented the long-term unemployed group (that is people looking for work more than 12months)⁴⁸. That is a much lower proportion compared with their 58% share in the total number of registered unemployed. At the same time the earlier programs to activate the long-term unemployed have been replaced by programs co-financed with ESF funds. In 2004 programs financed through ESF encompassed 600 long-term unemployed in Radom district.

⁴⁷ Act of April 20, 2004 On Promoting Employment and Institutions of the Labour Market.

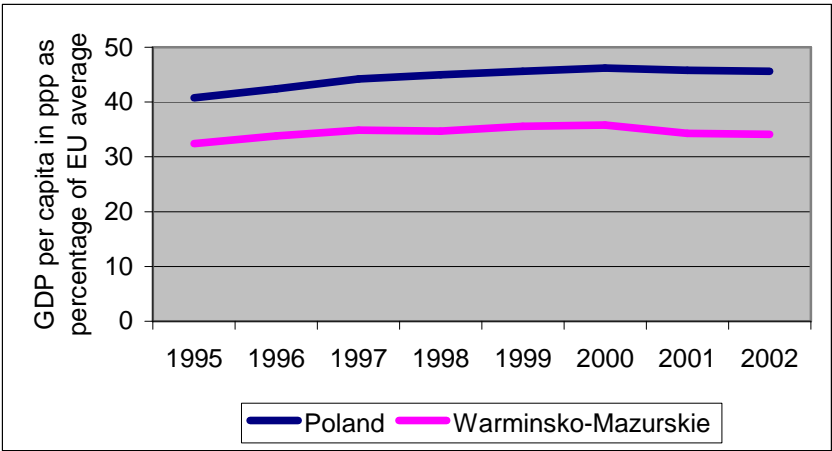
⁴⁸ See: Rynek pracy województwa mazowieckiego w 2004 r.[Labour Market of Mazovia Region in 2004]
<http://wup.mazowsze.pl/index.php?id=publikacje/publikacje>

Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship

Description of the Region

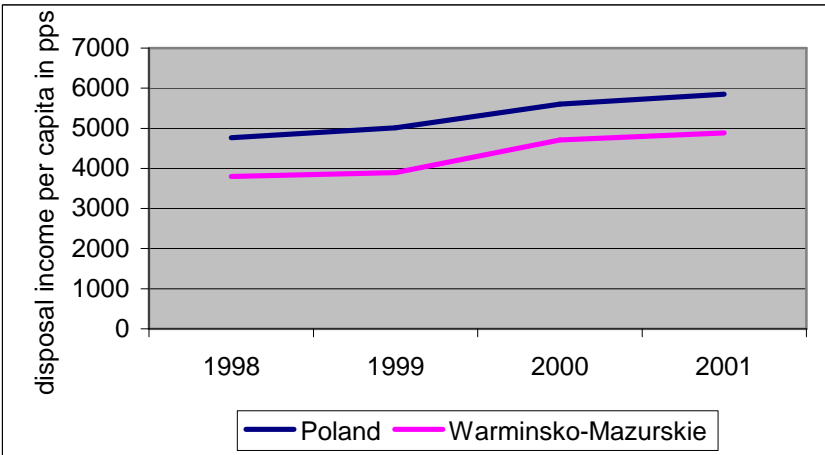
Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship, inhabited by 1.5 million people, is a typical region with accumulation of social problems relating to collapse of state-operated farms, obsolete and monoculture economy and general underdevelopment. GDP per capita in the region is much lower than the Polish national average, and the disparity has increased over the years 1995-2002 (Figure 3). Incomes of people in the region are correspondingly lower (see: Figure 4).

Figure 3. GDP per capita in Poland and in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region as percentage of EU average.



Source: Eurostat

Figure 4. Disposable Income per capita in pps in Poland and in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region



Source: Eurostat

Collapse of the state-owned farms and obsolete industry along with the consequential relatively low educational level of the population⁴⁹ have resulted during the years of transformation in a very high rate of unemployment and the linked social problems of poverty, mounting rate of addictions, crisis of families and anti-social behaviour.

Table 4. Main indicators of the labour market in Poland and in Warmińsko-Mazurskie region

Year	Employment rate		Unemployment rate		Long-term unemployment rate	
	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Poland	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Poland	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Poland
1999	45.7	49.6	19.5	12.3	42.72	41.64
2000	42.7	47.5	23.6	16.1	50.82	46.07
2001	42.1	46.1	23.5	18.2	55.14	50.19
2002	39.8	44.4	25.9	19.9	59.23	54.75
2003	41	44	23.9	19.6	67.42	55.95

Source: Eurostat.

The unemployed in the region include a high proportion of young people and people with low qualifications. There is a high share of long-term unemployed, out of work for more than a year.

Starting with 2003, unemployment started to drop slightly in the region, at a somewhat faster pace than the overall downward trend in of unemployment Poland.

Table 5. Registered unemployment rate in years 2002-2004.

1	2002	2003	2004	Increase/decrease in percentage points		
				3-2	4-3	4-2
	2	3	4	5	6	7
Poland	20.0	20.0	19.1	0	-0.9	-0.9
Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region	31.1	30.3	29.2	-0.8	-1.1	-1.9

Source: CSO

⁴⁹ Table 6. Education structure of Warmińsko-Mazurskie region population compared with average education structure of the entire Polish population

Education Poland (%) Warmińsko-Mazurskie region (%) Higher 13.56.09 Secondary 37.426.18 Basic vocational 34.420.93 Primary and incomplete primary 14.746.8 Source: Raport 2002. Narodowe Obserwatorium Kształcenia i Szkolenia Zawodowego, Warszawa 2003, Strategia Rozwoju Edukacji w Województwie Warmińsko-Mazurskim do 2015 r. [Report 2002. National Observatory of Vocational Education and Training, Warsaw 2003, Strategy for Development of Education in Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region to 2015]

Warmińsko-Mazurskie is, next to Lublin Voivodship, the region with the largest number of people living below the poverty line⁵⁰. Poverty is particularly prevalent in former state farm employee families: it is estimated that more than 20% of the population whose livelihood was earlier provided by state farm employment are living in abject poverty⁵¹.

Unemployment and poverty are the main reasons for seeking assistance from social assistance centres, which provide support to more than 20% of the region's population.

Impact of NAP Inclusion on social policy in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region

The Warmińsko-Mazurskie regional government has developed and adopted in 2001 a *Strategy for Social Assistance in Warmińsko-Mazurskie region until 20015*⁵², and following that several action programmes addressing problems of addictions, health and disabled persons, co-operation with NGOs, family and children and employment⁵³.

The Strategy for Social Assistance in Warmińsko-Mazurskie region defined 5 main areas to be addressed by the strategy:

- Soundly functioning family;
- Efficient and effective system to prevent exclusion of social groups;
- Efficient and effective system to counter and prevent the consequences of long-term unemployment among social assistance recipients;
- Mobilization of the social assistance partners;

⁵⁰ See: Warunki życia ludności [*Life conditions of the Population*], CSO, 2005; Growth, Employment and Living Standards in Pre-Accession Poland, World Bank, March 2004.

⁵¹ See: I.Topińska, K.Kuhl, Poverty in Poland, Profile 2001 and Changes 1994-2001, in: Employment and Living Standards in Pre-Accession Poland, World Bank, March 2004.

⁵² Following the new legislation on social assistance, the Strategy has been renamed in 2005 on Social Policy Strategy of Warmińsko-Mazurskie region until 2015,.

⁵³ Following operational programmes were adopted at the regional level:

- Regional Program of Preventing and Addressing Alcohol-Related Problems in Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region 2004-2007;
- Regional Program for Equal Opportunities and Preventing Social Exclusion of Disabled Persons 2004-2007
- Regional Co-Operation Program of Warmińsko-Mazurskie Self-Government with NGO-s in the Field of Social Assistance, Family Policy, Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Addressing Problems of Addictions 2004-2008;
- Regional Family Program 2004 – 2007;
- Program of Care for Family and Child and Establishment of Special Counselling Facilities in Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region 2002 – 2005;
- Improvement of Educational Chances for Children and Youth from Rural Environments of Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region 2000-2005;
- Regional Program for Counteracting Drug Addiction in Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region 2000-2004.
- Regional Action Plan on Employment in 2005.

All documents in Polish. www.wm.24.pl

- Creating awareness in the area of social assistance.

This strategy and specific programmes have been developed by dedicated teams with representation of regional and local social assistance and employment institutions, regional, county and commune-level self-government councils as well as selected NGOs and social partners. Their work was extensively consulted in communes and counties of the region.

In 2005 the region's communes and counties, responding to requirements of the new Social Assistance Act, have drafted their own programmes for addressing social problems.

NAP Inclusion has no direct impact on social policy implementation in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region. The document is known in social assistance institutions of both regional and local levels, and was assessed as consistent with the strategic and operational social assistance documents already implemented by them in the region. The regional authorities also do not guide themselves directly by NAP Inclusion guidelines on the indicators to monitor progress in implementing the Strategy. Monitoring of regional strategy implementation is done using a set of indicators developed for the regional purpose.

It should be noted that, thanks to actions taken as part of NAP Inclusion, some of the efforts implemented in the region on the basis of regional social strategy have gained much more extensive possibilities of development. This holds particularly for progress in financial assistance for secondary school and university-level students and the actions directed at social and vocational integration of persons excluded from the labour market. These opportunities came up thanks to introduction of new statutory regulations concerning financial assistance to school and university students, vocational activation of persons excluded from the labour market, and the legislation on social employment. Access to European Union structural funds has also become a major element bolstering regional policy. Such funds not only significantly extend the possibilities of funding specific programmes, but also direct the efforts made in the region to a large extent than before on actions linked with NAP Inclusion.

Co-ordination of social policy in the region.

Autonomy of the geographic self-government levels brings up the need for setting up mechanisms for co-ordinating social policy at the national and regional level. Warmińsko-Mazurskie region can serve as an example of consistently followed policy of 'soft' co-ordination of actions initiated by self-governments at various levels. Social policy co-ordination in the region is based on a mix of actions, rooted in the partnership principle.

Such actions cover:

Involving local (county and commune level) self-governments in the teams developing strategies and programmes, and extensive consultations with these bodies;

- Designing programmes rooted in collaboration of selected local self-governments with institutions of regional-level self-government and other partners (NGOs, local and national institutions involved in specific aspects of social policy, social partners, academic centres);
- Setting up a system to monitor progress in implementing strategy: a set of indicators was designed to assess the degree of meeting the set operational targets; basing on data compiled from all counties and communes a report is prepared on implementation of strategies and programmes, for presentation to regional authorities;
- A mechanism was introduced for co-funding with regional budget allocations of selected programmes by a competitive process;
- There is extensive support with promotional and information actions;
- Training is provided for staffs of social assistance institutions on local level regarding designing of projects in selected social policy areas.

Equalization of educational opportunities for children and youth.

The Warmińsko-Mazurskie region is characterised by relatively low education levels of its inhabitants, something that is a contributing factor to unemployment and poverty. On designation of the region as a single administrative province in 1999, the issue of improving education levels has become one of regional policy priorities.

In the year 2000 regional authorities adopted a Program for Improving the Educational Chances of Children and Youths from Rural Environments of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region, which called for providing financial assistance to children and youths continuing their education in secondary schools, and such assistance to students continuing education at university level. The program was financed out of the regional and county budgets. In the years 2001-2003 the number of secondary school students encompassed by the program was rather limited: about 1000 per year, and the amount of assistance came to PLN 90 -160 (€ 25 40) per month. The number of university students receiving assistance under the program in the region came to only 19 in 2001 and 42 in 2003. It is estimated that the number of school pupils living in families eligible for financial assistance⁵⁴ in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region is about 15 thousand, and the number of post-secondary level students – 12 thousand.

Starting with 2004, under the new regulations concerning financial assistance to school and university students and the opportunity to receive financial support from EU structural funds for education of young people, the program has been extended considerably. While the amounts spent by counties and regional authorities on scholarships for school and university

⁵⁴ The income criteria are the same as by the social assistance.

students in the region did not exceed in total PLN 1 million annually in the years 2000 -2003, the region has now been allocated nearly PLN 60 million from ESF and the state budget for the program of scholarships for school and university students in the years 2004 - 2006. Nonetheless, delays in implementing the program caused that the number of students encompassed by the program in 2004 increased only slightly. In 2004 the program was endorsed by 93 communes and 19 (out of total of 21) counties in the region⁵⁵.

A valuable effect of the regional Program implemented since 2001 was the spurring of commune and county self-governments along with NGOs to set up local scholarship programmes. In 2004 financial support from funds of other institutions and NGOs has been provided to nearly 10 thousand secondary and higher level students.

A significant barrier to education, to gaining learning in rural environments is the financial and living standard of local children and youths. Both diagnosis and practice indicate that many of the persons encompassed by the program would have no chance for an equal start, were it not for the financial assistance provided.

Social and vocational integration of long-term unemployed.

(a) Active Labour Market Programs for people excluded form the labour market.

One critical problem of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region is the shortage and low effectiveness of social and vocational integration programmes for the long-term unemployed and other groups excluded from the labour market. The activation tools available to labour offices until 2004 did not address the needs and capabilities of people with long-term unemployed status. Furthermore, vocational activation was not a priority for labour offices of Warmińsko-Mazurskie region in view of the high costs involved and very restricted funds available for activation programmes. This was particularly true, since the long-term unemployed, no longer eligible for unemployment allowances, were passed on to support through welfare assistance centres.

The social and vocational integration programmes for the long-term unemployed launched, starting with the year 2000 on initiative of social assistance institutions in cooperation with labour offices, were marked by limited effectiveness in terms of social integration and negligible effectiveness in terms of securing permanent employment⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ In year 2004 financial assistance is being provided only to 1200 secondary school students and 42 university students. See: *The Report on Implementation in 2004 of the Program on Improvement of Educational Chances for Children and Youths from Rural Communities of Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region in the years 2000 – 2005*. Regional Social Policy Centre, Olsztyn 2005.

⁵⁶ Starting with 2000, working jointly with the region's county authorities, county Labour Offices and welfare assistance offices, programs have been implemented for social and vocational integration of long-term unemployment recipients of welfare assistance. These programs were geared primarily to support for

The program documents adopted by regional self-government in 2005⁵⁷ point to evolution of a sort of ‘division of tasks’ in handling problems of groups long-term excluded from the labour market. *The Regional Plan on Employment for 2005* does not specify the question of vocationally activating long-term unemployed persons (seeking work for more than 24 months) as a priority task for labour offices in the region. The document specifies that this group should be treated primarily to actions of social assistance character. In addition, the document mentions the European Social Fund and the Social Employment Act as the prime tools for vocational integration of such people⁵⁸

The issue of social and vocational integration of this group of people is, however, one of the 5 priorities of Regional Social Policy Strategy, which lists the following operational goals:

- High effectiveness of social and vocational activation programmes for long-term unemployed recipients of social welfare assistance;
- Eliminating the phenomenon of inheriting joblessness in families receiving welfare assistance;
- Eliminating social and vocational degradation of welfare assistance recipients;
- Ensuring low poverty levels of persons and families.

Since 2004 most efforts relating to vocational activation of long-term unemployed have been taken over by the programmes financed with external European funds. Until June 30, 2005, the various labour market programmes supported by European funds (PHARE and ESF) have encompassed some 5200 long-term unemployed. In contrast, the programmes financed

employment of the long-term unemployed with low qualifications, who were generally unattractive to potential employers, drawn mostly from the pool of foreign state-owned farm workers.

The programs involved signing a social contract with encompassed participants, developing individual action plans dedicated to specific families, participating in courses and training, and taking up regular jobs or self-employment by at least one member of a family covered by the program.

Contrary to the underlying goals, in most cases it did not prove the possibility to ensure permanent employment for the persons covered by the program. The persons covered by the program manifested limited interest in attending the courses and training offered. The low effectivity of the programs could be blamed on a combination of several factors, such as difficult economic and social situation of the communes and counties taking part, insufficient funds for carrying out the fundamental elements of the program, namely activation-oriented courses and training, which would enable social and economic activation of the jobless program participants. Also stressed was the passivity and despondency of program participants and their lack of motivation to take up regular employment. The opportunity to strike regular, comprehensive dialogue and collaboration between program partners was also not taken up to the full extent. The benefits of the programs were: a positive impact of the psychological workshops on attitudes of program participants, the chance to learn new skills and qualifications, and altering attitudes and behaviour of some program participants and their families in the direction of more self-reliance and acquiring new skill relating to seeking jobs.

⁵⁷ This applies primarily to Social Policy Strategy and the Regional Employment Plan.

⁵⁸ See: Regional Action Plan for Employment 2005.

domestically (by the Labour Fund) in 2004 encompassed some 900 unemployed persons, and in 2005 around 400 people out of work for long periods benefited from such initiatives⁵⁹. One notes the positive evolution of programmes in the direction of more differentiated and comprehensive forms, reflecting the changed regulations governing active labour market policies. The effectiveness⁶⁰ of programmes addressed to the long-term unemployed continues to be low, at some 20% in 2004⁶¹.

(b) Good practise: Social Integration Centre

Efforts to bring about social and vocational integration of excluded persons are carried out under regulations governing social employment. The Social Employment Act adopted in 2003 provided the statutory basis for setting up so-called Social Integration Centres and Social Integration Clubs. These Centres and Clubs provide a chance for social and vocational re-integration to high-risk groups, such as homeless people, people addicted to alcohol or drugs, mentally ill people, people out of work for more than 24 months, ex-convicts released from prisons, refugees. The Social Employment Act which provides the formal basis for setting up Social Integration Centres and Clubs, spells out co-operation procedures and defines the division of responsibilities between local labour market institutions and welfare facilities. Currently there are two Social Integration Centres (at Olsztyn and Ostróda) and 49 Social Integration Clubs in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region.

Formation of Social Integration Centres and Clubs was intensively supported and promoted by the Regional Social Policy Centre. Training has been organised on developing projects relating to such initiatives and a competition has been organised, under which the best designed projects received a financial support. Undoubtedly, the number of such institutions formed in the region was also due to the fact that municipalities had to set up such Clubs, if they wanted to have access to programmes for subsidised employment of the jobless people⁶². In many communes such programmes are treated as a way for obtaining co-financing for infrastructure investment projects.

The Social Integration Centre in Olsztyn.

The Social Integration Centre in Olsztyn, the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region capital city, was set up in 2004 as first such venture in Poland. The concept behind the Centre was rooted in working with excluded persons for extended periods at once through psychological training

⁵⁹ Information provided by Regional Labour Office in Olsztyn.

⁶⁰ Success of programmes is measured by ratio of people in employment 3 months after completion of the program to the total number of people encompassed by the program.

⁶¹ On the basis of information provided by Regional Labour Office in Olsztyn.

⁶² Under the new regulations concerning employment and unemployment, participation in public works is open to persons who have earlier taken part in programmes of Social Integration Clubs or Social Integration Centres.

and care and by training and job practice assignments. The re-integration program offered by the Centre is aimed at rebuilding and upholding the skill of the people, to whom the efforts are addressed, to take part in the life of local communities and taking up social roles at the workplace, at their place of residence or temporary stay, and building up capacities to do work in the labour market on their own, in other words, living up to the idea of 'work instead of dole'.

People are directed to the Centre through welfare assistance facilities, with an essential condition for encompassing by the program is high personal motivation to take up work. For twelve months participants receive an activation benefit from the Labour Office. The twelve months support period covers a detailed psychological, social and vocational diagnosis, a monthly, individually designed program of therapeutic activities, covering such issues as an active and responsible attitude to life, self-assessment and sense of own worth, inter-personal communication, coping with stress, plus an eleven months period of vocational re-integration (vocational training and job practice assignments to employers) combined with continued psychological support. In the vocational re-integration part of the program, Centre participants learn and upgrade their qualifications, learn to practice vocations in an open labour market. Vocational re-integration is being pursued through 23 institutions in the city of Olsztyn. These include entities of local self-government, state administration and private enterprises. Such a mix allows for a more attractive offer of the Centre to inhabitants and widening the range of positions, for which Social Integration Centre participants can upgrade their qualifications, matching their personal aptitudes. The first edition of the program encompassed 26 people (the second 21 people), usually in the older productive age brackets. The groups were dominated by people with low educational status. The people were out of work for long periods, were in various ways dysfunctional (homeless, ex convicts, people after addiction treatment programmes, lone parents raising children, mentally ill).

The Centre program proved highly successful: 70% of the encompassed people have taken up work as result of the program, with 15% of the people hired by employers without claiming employment subsidies.

Until now the Social Integration Centre is financed by the Olsztyn municipality and Ministry of Social Policy. Unfortunately, in the future the initiative is lacking on financial sustainability.

While the program of the Olsztyn-based Social Integration Centre is highly effective in social and vocational integration of people excluded from the labour market, the effectiveness of this integration approach is considerably more questionable as regards Social Integration Clubs. The Clubs have a much lesser capacity to offer support for the excluded. Persons enrolled in

the Clubs have access to job and psychological counselling and to vocational training, and on completion of the program are eligible for subsidised employment programmes.

Nidzica

General information.

The community [*gmina*] is located in the southern part of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie region, covering the town Nidzica and surrounding villages. The community population is 36,000 people, of which 15,000 live in the town of Nidzica. The community is a typical area with significant social problems, resulting from the collapse of local state-owned farms and industries, caused by the initial stages of economic transformation.

At the end of year 2004, the registered unemployment rate in Nidzica reached approximately 26%. About fifty percent of the unemployed are persistently unemployed and 77% do not qualify to unemployment benefits. More than 70% of the unemployed are people with low levels of education (primary or incomplete secondary).

In 2004, there were approximately 1,300 families beneficiaries of social assistance, which amounts to app. 5% of the total population of community. Most of the social benefits were disbursed in villages inhabited by the families of former state-farm employees. The most frequent reason for qualification to social assistance is unemployment.

Table 7. Social assistance beneficiaries in the Nidzica community in 2004 (functional breakdown)

Reasons for qualification to the benefit	Number of families qualifying to social assistance	Number of persons in the families	% of populations receiving social assistance benefits (versus total population of the municipality)
Poverty	112	461	0.5
Orphanhood	1	1	0.004
Homelessness	15	18	0.06
Need to protect maternity	82	363	0.37
Unemployment	351	1348	1.60
Disability	271	583	1.23
Persistent illness	116	446	0.52
Helplessness in parental, educational and household upkeeping matters, including:	85	399	0.38
▪ Single-parent families	67	226	0.30
▪ Families with many children	32	122	0.14
Alcoholism	3	7	0.01
Drug addiction	0	0	0
Difficulty to adapt to social life after incarceration	0	0	0
Natural or environmental disaster	21	25	0.09

Source: *Strategy for Resolution of Social Problems 2005- 2013*, Nidzica 2005. www.nidzica.pl

Strategy for Resolution of Social Problems

In 2005, the authorities of the Nidzica community have approved a resolution on the *Strategy for Resolution of Social Problems 2005-2013*. The key operational goals of this strategy are:

- Establishment of effective programs for activation of the persistently unemployed beneficiaries of social assistance programs,
- Limitation of unemployment inheritance phenomena,
- Improvement of the financial situation of social assistance beneficiaries, including limitation of homelessness and control of social pathology phenomena,
- Prevention of family crisis phenomena,
- Awareness building in the area of social assistance.

The community is aiming at achieving those goals through a wide range of activities, such as: establishment of effective activation programs, subsidized employment, assistance to entrepreneurs, establishment of a Social Integration Club, signing of social agreements, development and implementation of equal opportunity programs for children and youth from the poorest families, development and implementation of homelessness prevention programs, establishment of mutual-assistance groups and specialized consulting, establishment of assistance facilities for the disabled, development and implementation of a special program for former prisoners, etc. Despite the very ambitious action plan, the strategy does not include reliable and detailed diagnosis or personnel reinforcement of the social assistance structures in the Nidzica⁶³, neither does it include a budget or schedule of activities and identification of institutions responsible for its implementation. Like in the case of many other communities and districts in Poland, the Strategy seems to be an administrative exercise rather, resulting from the obligation to perform some regulatory responsibilities, required by the Social Assistance Act and has a little chance to be implemented.

Equalization of educational opportunities for children and youth.

In 1999, the Nidzica Local Fund [*Nidzicki Fundusz Lokalny*] was established– an association responsible for qualification and distribution of scholarships financed by private individuals and enterprises. The list of scholarship sponsors includes local enterprises, employees of local banks, companies and public institutions, who voluntarily tax their salaries for the benefit of the fund, as well as external sponsors. The scholarships of the Nidzicki Local Fund are granted to secondary school students who are in difficult financial situation and who achieve

⁶³ Currently, there are approximately 3,000 inhabitants per social worker, which is much more than it should be under the law (2,000).

very good results in education. In 2003, the Fund has granted 30 scholarships, amounting to PLN 30,000 to the students from the Nidzica municipality. In 2004, there were 32 qualifiers, receiving a total of PLN 34,000.

The ESF and state budget funds extended substantially the scholarships system. During the school year of 2004/2005, the scholarships finance by ESF were granted to more than 400 students from the rural areas of the community, who have received a scholarship of PLN 100 per month. Assistance was granted to all students of secondary schools, whose family *per capita* income does not exceed PLN 500 per month. The significant limitation of ESF financial support, resulting from a shortage of funds, has particularly impacted the ESF scholarship assistance program for higher school students. Due to financial shortages, assistance was granted to 42 students only (those with a *per capita* family income below PLN 130). The scholarship amounted to PLN 150 per month.

Additionally, scholarships resulting from the Educational System Act have been granted during the February-June semester of school year 2004/2005, in the town and municipality of Nidzica. However, the shortage of funds did not allow disbursement of adequate amounts. Almost 1,100 students with a *per capita* income of less than PLN 316 per month have qualified to the assistance. The amount of assistance for the entire semester period was PLN 160. Due to the lack of funds, no scholarships were granted in the winter semester of 2005/2006.

Financial assistance for people living in poverty.

The new Social Assistance Act did not result in significant change of the social assistance system's financial standing in the Nidzica region. The periodic allowance, being a form of financial assistance for people and families in temporary financial difficulty is only financed from central budget subsidies, not from municipal resources. The subsidies are only sufficient to cover minimum requirements, as specified by the law.

Table7. Temporary benefits in the Nidzica community, over 2003-2005

Year	Number of qualified beneficiaries	Number of families	Average benefit granted (PLN)
2003	455	444	168
2004	278	274	120
I – VI 2005	234	238	155

Source: Information of the Municipal Social Assistance Center in Nidzica

Activation of social assistance beneficiaries

In compliance with the Social Employment Act, the Nidzica community has established a Social Integration Club. It is at the initial stage of operation. It is being assumed that the program of the Club, aimed at those persistently unemployed and beneficiaries of social assistance will cover both practical training and specialized consulting. It is also being planned to provide the Club members with the support of a psychologist and professional vocational advisor.

Janowo

The Janowo community [*gmina*] is located in the southern part of the warmińsko-mazurskie region, in the Nidzica district [*powiat*]. The community is inhabited by 3,075 people. The Janowo community is a typical poor and non-industrialized agricultural area, with a characteristic low level of the population's economic activity. About 1/2 of the local population works for living in agriculture. Due to seasonal employment in the agricultural sector, the number of people without sufficient income increases significantly in the winter season. The average low education of the community population (improving with age) and the lack of access to vocational training and re-orientation programmes results in increases in unemployment and economic inactivity. A large group of people being persistently unemployed and deprived of the unemployment benefit have lost their formal status of unemployed since they can not afford the trip to the local employment office, to confirm their readiness to take on a job⁶⁴.

Social assistance in the community is covering about 250-300 families (being 30-40% of the community population). Expenses to the social assistance programs of the community are high, amounting to PLN 150 per inhabitant yearly. The main reasons for granting assistance are poverty and unemployment. The issue of unemployment, including persistent unemployment affects most of the families receiving social assistance from Communal Social Assistance Centre in Janowo. Unemployment has several negative consequences. In many families, we encounter cases inheritance of unemployment. The efficiency of programmes aimed at the persistently unemployed is very low.

The Community of Janowo has passed a resolution on the Strategy for Resolving Social Problems in 2004-2013. The key areas of this strategy are:

- Persistent unemployment ,
- Family crisis,
- Disabled, persistently ill and elderly people,
- Marginalization of social groups,
- Collaboration with NGO organizations.

One of the first projects undertaken under the Strategy is the establishment of a Social Integration Club. The Social Integration Club in Janowo is an information and consultation point for persons, who are long-term unemployed or economically inactive. It has been established in April 2005. Establishment of the Club did not attract much interest of the recipients of social assistance. The concept of the Club developed in a spontaneous way, at the initial phase, meetings were organized with a vocational advisor. In subsequent sessions,

⁶⁴ In consequence, those people are no longer covered by the health insurance.

members were involved in hand-crafts activities and ornament making training. During the sessions, which have attracted interest of women, basic information was communicated on the topics of labour market exploration (writing CV's, motivation letters, work brokerage). Instructors were appointed from among the participants of the club workshops, to manage subsequent meetings with the female club members (leather adornments, embroidery, and knitting). The Club meetings are taking place weekly (2 hours), attended by 15 women.

The experience to date of the Social Integration Club in Janowo indicates that the formula of the Social Integration Club concept must be adapted to the specific environment and its conditions. In rural areas, where communication difficulties are an obstacle, social integration club activity may be less intense than in municipal communities. Due to the specific circumstances of the environment of the club, its formula may contribute to the social integration of social assistance recipients, enhancement of their self-valuation and increased participation in social life. Undoubtedly, these are the goals that may improve the local population's quality of life. We have to remember however that they do not lead, and can not lead to professional activity of social assistance recipients.

