

## **Results from the program for social benefit in the voivodeship of Podlaskie**

*Analysis carried out for the Voivodeship Labour Office in Białystok by the Coffey International Development concludes low level of employment effectiveness in program for works for social benefit (WSB). However, the research shows other benefits from the program for the participants (unemployed and having social assistance) and organizers of those programs.*

### **What are programs for social benefit?**

WSB were introduced 7 years ago. They include works run by gminas (commune) in the Centres for Social Assistance (CSAs), organizations and institutions for the local communities (for example: social care centres, schools and nurseries).

Participants of WSB are directed by the starosts (in practice by the Local Labour Office - LLO) and they include: unemployed who do not have the right to unemployment benefit but are entitled to other forms of social assistance and participate in social schemes such as social contracts. Most of those people have been unemployed for a long time and struggle to improve their situation on the labour market.

Person directed to participate in WSB can work 10 hours a week upon agreed fee for his/her work. WSB are funded from gmina's budget and in 60% by the Labour Fund.

### **Goals of the WSB**

Results from the research show three main goals of WSB. For the Local Labour Offices the aim is to enhance employment adaptability and to end in employment. LLO sees the first as the step towards the second.

CSAs see WSB differently. For them the main aim of WSB should be social integration: to start activities outside the house, enhance level of cooperation in the work place and increase the level of self-esteem.

Different view have representatives of the institutions where WSB are organized. They understand the importance of social integration and employment adaptability, but for them the most important is the support and services they get from the participants of the WSB. These institutions (gminas, city halls, schools, nurseries, Centres for Social Assistance, municipal enterprises, local culture institutes and so on) do not pay for those services themselves as they are funded by gminas and the Labour Fund.

For WSB participants most important is social integration as they want to start activities outside the house. They also hope for additional financial benefits as a result of participation in WSB. Every month they get extra 300 zł, along with the right for social support from CSAs and LLOs.

### **Who participates in WSB?**

Most of the participants are 40-60 year-old (average age in the voivodeship of Podlaskie is 45 year-old), and more women than men (55%). Most of them do not have A-level (matura) but vocational qualifications. They are also cases of people with light level of disabilities and alcoholics after treatment. Alcoholics are not involved in WSB due to organizers prior bad experience with those people.

WSB participants are people who have experience in low-skill work and providing simple services but are unemployed for a long time (87%). Discussions with them show, that they are willing to

undertake any type of job as are highly motivated to change their situation, this is the case especially for women. This goes against the general opinion that people unemployed for a long time are used to their situation and do not do much to change their circumstances.

From the legal side, little has changed in terms of organizing WSB, though some of the CSAs (who are responsible for directing people to WSB) have changed their tactics in delegating people for work within WSB. In the first years, CSAs send people described as *difficult* – many of them alcoholics, who did not do their job sufficiently and were sent back by the WSB organizers who struggled to work with them and also because some of those institutions are education centres, where various incidents should be prevented and not allowed. Nowadays, CSAs tend to send to participate in WSB people who are responsible and highly motivated. Also participation in WSB is seen as a type of reward and in some provinces there are more candidates than places to participate in the program.

### **Barriers in running WSB in the voivodeship of Podlaskie**

One of the main barriers is low interest of people on unemployment benefits (this reason is mostly pointed by the CSAs and LLOs) but also gminas (according to LLOs). In the opinion of CSAs the reason for this is gminas' low budget for fight with social exclusion and the fact that gminas prefer to spend money on other projects and social support for those socially excluded.

### **Effectiveness and benefits of WSB**

Despite many benefits of WSB, it has low effectiveness in ending with employment. In the voivodeship of Podlaskie only 26% WSB participants found a job at the end of the program when average rates for other employment enhancing programs is 57,5% and for the subsidized employment programs 75%. Low level of employment after participating in WSB has also been confirmed by the LLOs in the voivodeship of Podlaskie which register the changes – the likelihood of finding a job after participating in WSB is lower than among people with the same socio-demographic characteristics in a control group. It is also important to state that employment rates vary in the region – in the provinces of łomżyńskie, monieckie, suwalskie and zambrowskie, the level is over 40%. Moreover, in the voivodeship of Podlaskie WSB has the lowest costs (799zł) compare to other regions in the country. On the other hand, additional employment within WSB costs 2 884 zł which also is much lower compare to other employment enhancing programs where average cost is 7 400 zł.

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