

Research entitled " **The professional activity of the inhabitants of villages and small cities in the region of Podlaskie Province** " for the needs of the project "Podlaskie Social Policy Observatory", co-financed from the European Social Fund

**Media report describing conclusions from research entitled:  
"The professional activity of the inhabitants of villages and small cities in the region of  
Podlaskie Province"**

***What does characterise the inhabitants of villages and small towns of Podlaskie Province?***

*Podlaskie Province is a specific region - in comparison with other regions of the country it has a high employment in agriculture and is also the least developed economically. What is more, Podlaskie Province is strongly differentiated in terms of the potential of the individual districts. The professional activity of the population of the province stands at the national average, and the activity of looking for a job is one of the lowest in Poland. Residents of rural areas and small towns are characterised by the low educational and social activity.*

In the period from May to November 2013, the Provincial Labour Office in Białystok performed the research co-funded by the European Union under the European Social Fund, entitled: "The professional activity of the inhabitants of villages and small cities in the region of Podlaskie Province", as part of the project: Social Policy Observatory of Podlaskie. The research was conducted by the Institute of Research and Studies, Olsztyn Group, School of Business by order of the Provincial Employment Agency.

The main objective of the research was to provide information on the activity of the population living in rural areas and small towns in Podlaskie Province. The research was to demonstrate the potential of human resources and the factors that affect their professional, social and economic activity. In the course of the research project, a number of techniques of research, both quantitative as well as qualitative were used: Computer-assisted telephone interviews, individual in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and a panel of experts.

Podlaskie Province has one of the lowest levels of economic development and industrialization in comparison with the other Polish regions. It is a typical agricultural region, but with very differential potential and farming conditions existing between districts and municipalities. Interest in investment by foreign capital is limited due to the very low attractiveness of the region. This is due to, among others: the low level of GDP, low absorption of the market, the low level of urbanization and development of infrastructure, poorly developed industrial production, little competitive workforce. A noticeable for years aging process of Polish society is not unknown for the Podlaskie Province. An analysis of available statistical data shows a steady decline in the number of population in the province, with simultaneous changes in the population structure between urban and rural areas. The decrease in the number of inhabitants of the province is affected by: a negative balance of internal and international migration for permanent residence and a negative natural growth, while in the provincial towns the natural growth rate stood at a positive level and the whole decline was concentrated in rural areas.

The professional activity of the population of the province stands at the national average, while the professional activity rate is the highest among those with higher education. This indicator is also higher among men than women. The unemployment rate in the province is at a higher level than in the country - in 2012, the highest value of this indicator was recorded in the districts of Grajewo and Sejny, while the lowest in districts wysokomazowieckie and bielskie. In most districts with a

Research entitled " **The professional activity of the inhabitants of villages and small cities in the region of Podlaskie Province** " for the needs of the project "Podlaskie Social Policy Observatory", co-financed from the European Social Fund predominance of rural areas, the unemployment rate is lower than in urban areas, which is mainly related to the relatively high proportion of people working in the agricultural sector. At the same time the activity of the inhabitants of Podlaskie Province in looking for a job is one of the lowest in Poland.

The labour market in the Podlaskie Province is seen as unique because of the high employment in agriculture. The situation on the regional labour market is difficult and is affected primarily by small number of large businesses that generate workplaces. Industry and manufacturing facilities are concentrated in the larger urban centres. The countryside, on the other hand, is dominated by agriculture. Large cities, in particular, Białystok, play a key role in stimulating economic activity of inhabitants of villages and small towns. Due to the richer labour market, they create the main directions of migration for work. The main sources of income of the inhabitants of villages and small towns are incomes from agriculture and agricultural subsidies. Quite common is also going abroad for seasonal work (especially for young people), as well as seasonal work in construction. A frequent source of income is a pension or disability pension.

The main reason for professional inactivity of inhabitants of villages and small towns are the economic benefits achieved in a way other than from contract work. Social support, the amount of received benefits which often outweigh the amount of the national minimum wage. Obtained help is often the main source of income and is demotivating for making professional activity. The problem of the region which is contributing to the low professional activity is the lack of job offers. This is due to the small number of investors and new companies, as well as to the high costs of hiring a worker. The frequent barrier is the need to commute to workplace which is outside the place of residence. This problem should be considered in two aspects: the lack of public transport and high travel costs which exceed the received wage, which is often the lowest national.

Residents of rural areas and small towns are also characterised by low activity in the field of education and professional qualifications. The vast majority, over the last 2-3 years neither raised, nor change their professional qualifications. Often it is due to lack of need. The low activity in the field of education is further evidenced by the lack of interest in this type of activity in the near future. Due to the remoteness from major urban centres, the inhabitants of villages and small towns have limited access to many institutions, which can be a hindrance in daily functioning, but also affect the lack of social activity. The research results confirm that in many cases the inhabitants of villages and small towns are forced to commute to schools, learning centres, institutions providing courses and trainings, childcare facilities, community and health centres, as well as associations, which significantly hinders access to these institutions.

The activities which should be focused on, from the point of view of eliminating the degree of backwardness in the province, are mainly to support the development of regional competitiveness, to build territorial cohesion and to prevent marginalization of problem areas. In the development of entrepreneurship, an important role plays the local government, having a range of instruments to support conducting business, professional activity of society, social attitudes and to general climate of social cohabitation in the territory of the district or municipality. From the point of view of the development of entrepreneurship, the availability of clear and comprehensive local area development plan is very important. The incentive to operate a business is a flexible approach of the municipalities to the system of municipal tax deductions and exemptions for entrepreneurs. The key activities are also investments in infrastructure and support for different types of projects and institutions of economic development of the area. Investing in the municipality

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Information on the research is available on the website of the Podlaskie Social Policy Observatory <http://www.pops.up.podlasie.pl>