
Media Note describing the conclusions of the study "The risk of poverty among people working in the Podlaskie voivodship"

Poverty among working people - serious social problem

The main objective of the study was to specify the determinants of the creation of the phenomenon of working people, but even though at risk of poverty, the social groups most at risk of finding themselves in this situation, as well as the life situation of these people and the consequences of socio-economic phenomenon.

Origins of the working poor phenomenon

Working poor have only recently become a topic of interest to the social sciences. Usually, poverty was identified with the lack of income. With regard to western capitalism, researchers find the sources of the formation of the working poor in the changes that have taken place in the labor market. In case of countries undergoing system transformation, the reasons of the development of this phenomenon is the busting full-employment policy pursued by the socialist on one hand, and a radical abolition of the social protections for many members of society on the other. Moreover, some scientists are willing to see the cause of emerging the workers at risk of poverty in the need to adjust business operations to the requirements of competitiveness. Unfortunately, the pursuit of competitiveness in the economy is a price the society pays - there are some worrying phenomena such as underemployment (working below qualifications and / or part -time), or junk jobs (the work that does not require any skills and training - characteristic to the sector of services).

Influence of characteristic of Podlaskie voivodship to the phenomenon of working poor

In comparison with the rest of the country, there is a low level of entrepreneurship in Podlaskie voivodship. In addition, in the province, there is scarcity of well-developed road infrastructure (no motorways, the lowest length of railways in Poland). This situation does not encourage investment and thus brings to a halt creation of new, well- paid jobs that would be a remedy to the risk of poverty.

Podlaskie voivodship is urbanized only to a low extent. It is an agricultural province and the problem of working poor largely concerns the farmers. In particular, working poor are people with small, semi-subsistence farms.

The main source of the problem of working poor is the specification of the labor market. In case of a low labor supply, residents of the voivodship are forced to take low-paid jobs and these with no prospects. Therefore, the requirement for reducing the phenomenon of working poor is to provide a voivodship with more jobs - optionally well-paid and providing the opportunities for development. It is the goal of every strategy created in the voivodship, referring to solutions to social problems, regardless of whether it was prepared at the regional, county, or municipal level.

Factors influencing the incidence of working poor

The study proved that in Podlaskie the poverty among the working has the following main sources:

- a) multi-person households
- b) in the household, the presence of adults with no income,

- c) an unstable and fragile nature of the relationship of the working poor with the labor market (e.g. part-time job). Only 21.41 % of the survey respondents have a permanent contract. About 30 % of respondents in the age groups 26-44 and 45-68 work on non-employment basis,
- d) taking employment inconsistent with educational qualifications,
- e) low salaries.

Low qualifications and low educational level are specific for working poor.

Characteristics of workers at risk of poverty

The working poor in the Podlaskie province are primarily the young or the middle-aged. In the tested group of people aged 18-25 it was 19.7% of respondents, and in the group aged 26-45 years - 52% of the respondents. The population of working poor live in multi-generational and multi-person households.

Most of them have a vocational education (51,8% of the respondents), fewer secondary (15,0%), or secondary vocational (17,8%). Since those people often take job which is not relevant to their education, they are low-paid, and have no opportunities for professional advancement, or the acquisition of new vocational skills. This in turn leads to the persistence of poverty. The presence of children in the household with parents' low income affects the risk of poverty. In the research sample, almost 70 % of the working poor have at least one child. This observation is perhaps the most important conclusion in the context of the debate on demographic catastrophe and the development of family policy. It should be underlined that the issue of family care (equality of educational opportunities for people from poor families, child care) appears in all the records of the policies and programs concerning solving social problems. It is present in the documents at the regional and county, as well as at the municipal level. It is difficult for working poor to change jobs due to their low self-esteem. To overcome the cognitive dissonance, they accepted their poverty and their aspirations in life were dramatically reduced.

Living Conditions

Most of the working poor (40 % of respondents) have debts. Although their financial commitments are relatively small, but at low incomes, they turn out to be a heavy burden on the household budget. As a result, it is difficult to pay off those obligations. Most of the working poor is convinced that it is impossible for them to maintain themselves with the income they earn; they believe that money they dispose of allows them to satisfy only the most urgent needs. Unfortunately, it happens that they have not enough funds to meet their health and educational needs. The working poor respondents do not see a chance to improve their situation, which is the most disturbing result of the study.

Support for the working poor

In the voivodship and county strategic documents the working poor are not indicated as a separate group that requires support. However, this does not mean that they were deprived of help. They can use the forms of support addressed to the unemployed and benefit from the assistance of social welfare institutions. The latter are eligible for aid especially when the income of the working poor does not exceed the income threshold specified in the Regulation of the Ministry of Work and Social Policy.



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Role of employment for the working poor

The study also showed that the working poor hardly benefit from the social assistance. In addition, they state that in the event of an alternative between paid work and the use of the social benefits, they will choose the former. The amount of money, below which they would not normally undertake a paid work, oscillates around a thousand zlotys. These indications suggest that for the working poor the work is of great value, the autotelic.

The above conclusions come from the survey entitled "The risk of poverty of working people in the Podlaskie voivodship" conducted by Collect Consulting S.A. The project co-funded by the European Union under the European Social Fund, Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013, Measure 7.2 Tackling social exclusion and strengthening social economy sector, Sub-Measure 7.2.1

Professional and social activation of people at risk of social exclusion.

More information about the study can be found on the website of the Regional Labour Office in Białystok - Podlaskie Social Policy Observatory.

<http://www.pops.up.podlasie.pl/>