

# The phenomenon of long-term unemployment in the Podlaskie

Unemployment is a natural phenomenon on the labor market. Although we used to evaluate it negatively, in practice, it carries a range of positive consequences. These include mainly anti-inflationary action mechanisms and stimulating competition on the labor market, which in turn provides an incentive for education and training for employees. However, experts seem to be in agreement that the positive effects of unemployment can speak only when it has a short-term nature.

Meanwhile, according to the official statistics, in May 2011, every second unemployed person registered at the employment office Podlaskie unsuccessfully sought employment for at least one year. Such people who remain in the official records for more than 12 months in total during the past 2 years, are classified to the category of long-term unemployed people. Long-term unemployment is considered as one of the most serious problems on the modern job market. Economists see it as a source of considerable depreciation of human resources in the labor market. It is also considered as a factor of an impoverishment of the long-term unemployed people's families. In this context, come questions about survival strategies in a situation of prolonged absence of permanent employment and about problems with unofficial employment (so called: grey zone). Sociologists point out the transformation which is a subject to the social environment of the unemployed - a prolonged period of unemployment means a change in the existing structure of social roles of an unemployed person. Long-term unemployment has its consequences not only for civic and political involvement, it can also translate into changes in system of the values of an unemployed person and affect her relationships with loved ones or friends. Long-term unemployment is also the subject of psychological research - many studies have shown that prolonged periods of unemployment may be reflected in a decline of motivation, lower self-esteem and even cause depression. From the perspective of labor market institutions, studying the phenomenon of long-term unemployment is particularly important in the context of the opportunities to develop the most effective methods of assistance for people who unsuccessfully, often for years, are looking for a work.

Careful analysis of the scale and specifics of long-term unemployment in the Podlaskie was possible thanks to research conducted by Gallup on behalf of the Regional Labour Office in Białystok (Podlaskie Observatory in the Labour Market and Economic Forecasting). The project "The phenomenon of long-term unemployment in the Podlaskie" was implemented in the last quarter of 2011.

Gallup pollsters conducted the interviews with 1,000 long-term unemployed people. The study was preceded by a careful analysis of already existing data (GUS statistics and data collected by the labor offices), in-depth interviews carried out with a long-term unemployed people and representatives of labor market institutions. The accumulated material sheds new light on the situation of long-term unemployment in the region - survey showed what may be the social and psychological effects of long-term unemployment and what should be the potential directions of designated public interventions to counter this negative phenomenon.

With the average registered unemployment rate (13%), Podlaskie voivodeship is characterized by a high share of long-term unemployed among all unemployed people (53%). In the years 2006-2010 long-term unemployment became equally the problem of men and women- while even 5 years ago it was a problem affecting more women (55%), currently the shares of both sexes are similar. Long-term unemployment seems to affect people of all ages - the share of long-term unemployed among the inhabitants of the region is similar in all age categories. Nearly one in three long-term unemployed in the region's has lower secondary education – this category is smaller among other unemployed people (20%). Simultaneously, the share of university graduates in the group of long-term unemployed is almost twice smaller than among other job seekers. The vast majority of unemployed men (84%) has no dependent children. For comparison, 56% long-term unemployed women have families and children (53%). This observation indicates a different context of a long-term unemployment among women and men. As a survey has shown that long-term unemployed people under the age of 24 years usually live in a bigger households. People over 45 years old more often lead single households - this is 13% of the respondents in this age. In most of the respondents' families they were the only people currently seeking work. However, in villages and smaller towns, almost 25% of households from which respondents were recruited, had another unemployed person.

The problem of long-term unemployment has different scale in different counties of Podlaskie - the highest share of long-term unemployed among all registered in the labor offices was seen in augustowski and sokólski (62%). Not much better is in the counties Grajewo and Sejny. The lowest share of long-term unemployed relates to suwalski and wysokomazowiecki (42%).

Long-term unemployment usually causes serious financial problems for families affected by this problem. According to the study, at least 41% of households of long-term unemployed in the province live below the absolute poverty line. This is confirmed by data on income in the surveyed families - 13% of respondents answered that they live "very poorly" (among them, the average income in their households was 233 PLN per person), another 39% felt that they are living modestly (average income per person: 378 PLN). As survey shows, families who had access to farmland experienced slightly better material condition.

Almost every tenth person with the status of long-term unemployed, is not currently seeking for official work, because of the unofficial employment. Almost two thirds of respondents believe that in the Podlaskie it happens very often that people work in a "grey zone". In some counties this percentage was even higher: in hajnowski it was 80% and in sokólskim up to 92%. Slightly more than half of questioned respondents considered that the main reason for taking unofficial employment is the difficulty in finding another job, it also appears that it is possible to obtain higher wages while working unofficially.

One of the strategies to maintain the unemployment is emigration. A quarter of respondents ever left the country to work abroad – most often they were men and people aged 25-44, residents of kolneński or łomżyński counties. At the time of the study, most of the respondents (65%) was not interested in emigrating. Such plans had only 7% of respondents. Respondents use also other strategies for improving their own financial situation - 52% of men provides, with a small fee, a variety of small services, 27% helps in other farms, 17% were engaged in collecting waste paper and scrap metal. Unemployed women are more likely to earn some money picking mushrooms and wild berries (18% of respondents).

Using psychometric questions, researchers constructed a scale that allows measurement of the level of depression. They found that depressive feelings were much often experienced

by older people and rural areas residents. Higher level of depression was also connected with longer periods of unemployment and higher number of registrations at labor office. However, the impact of the last two factors, decreases in its importance in the face of other controlled variables such as age, income per person in the family or number of friends. It can therefore be said that the long-term unemployed vulnerability to depression is determined by a whole range of individual and social characteristics, and the mere fact of being a long-term unemployed is only one of the many factors.

When asked what is most important at work, long-term unemployed response like all Poles, that the good earnings are the most important. Long-term unemployed, however, depend less on job security - for this trait indicated 56%, while in the nationwide study, it was almost 80%. The unemployed seem to expect less from work – they are not so interested in a job which is responsible, corresponded to their abilities or gives a possibility to show leadership. These understated expectations seem to be the result of a protracted period of unemployment.

In the study, an attempt was made to investigate social networks in which long-term unemployed people are operating. The methodology corresponds to the approach first used in the U.S. General Social Survey. The method involves the reconstruction of the structure of the respondent's closest friends group. Long-term unemployed person pointed on average 2 people as his closest friends - about 1 / 5 of men and more than ¼ of the women mentioned three friends. Networks of women often consist of family members, it is not the case of unemployed men's networks - most likely this is due to the fact that fewer women are single in this group.

The fact that the networks of the respondents most often consist of their families' members, does not mean that they are people with whom long-term unemployed are often in contact and talking. Over half of respondents, regardless of gender, as a person with whom he talks most of the time, pointed his friend. Husband, wife or partner in this ranking took second place.

An interesting results were given by the analysis of the correlation between the share of people working in networks of the unemployed and the length of the period of unemployment. It turns out that the nature of the relationship is unambiguous: the longer a person remains unemployed, the smaller is the share of people working in his network of friends ( $r = -.109$ ,  $p < .005$ ). On the other hand, the share of unemployed people in the network of close friends of the long-term unemployed is positively and significantly correlated with the duration of unemployment ( $r = .088$ ,  $p < .01$ ). With the prolonged period of unemployment, among the closest friends of the long-term unemployed, the share of people who also do not have jobs increases. This phenomenon supports the hypothesis of the "spiral of degradation", which may touch the unemployed - those who remain unemployed longer, lose contact with people who are on the labor market. Consequently, for such individuals is even harder to find a job.

In the survey, respondents were also asked how do they handle their everyday businesses, are they helping other people and whether they get such help. The study showed that unemployed people are trying to maintain their resources of social capital, adopting an active strategy of building a network of friends. Long-term unemployed more often help than they expect somebody else's help. This strategy turns out to be an effective method of multiplication of social capital - according to survey results, people who often help, often also receive help.

Study revealed many aspects of the professional history of long-term unemployed. Among the respondents, only 14% (13% men and 17% of women) had no employment ever. Men more often than women change their employers – they had an average of 3.9 employers, while women - only 2.4 (data based on declarations of survey subjects). In last job respondents worked in manufacturing (23%), services, construction (18%) or trade (17%) - sectors with the highest rotation in the Podlaskie. Young people much less often than others lost their jobs due to reasons other than termination of the contract or own resignation. The oldest group of subjects relatively frequently became the victims of the liquidation of the job or position or was fired by the employer for other reasons.

Researchers also analyzed the factors affecting the duration of unemployment. It turned out, the shorter stay unemployed especially those who benefit from assistance in dealing with matters in the offices and taking care of children. The extension of time looking for work by helping men relates particularly to help which they gave to their neighbors and friends with small repairs and renovations. The average duration of unemployment is reduced even if the unemployed live in the same household with people who are working. Women, people over 44 years of age, people with lower education levels are looking for work for a longer time than other long-term unemployed.

Looking for a job is one of the main activities of long-term unemployed people. Nearly 90% of respondents found their last job through one of three routes of distribution offers: private contacts, direct application to the employer or the offer of the district labor office. The most effective, however is to seek for a job through the friends. District Labour Offices were more likely source of job offers used by women than by men. The latter in turn preferred the direct application to the employer.

Long-term unemployed, when asked about the reasons for the lack of success in job seeking usually indicate external factors: lack of jobs, lack of relevant knowledge and decent wages. Less commonly, inability to obtain employment was explained by their own inadequate qualifications.

Nearly 14% of respondents admitted they stopped looking for a work. They were mostly women and people with lower education levels. In the group of people who have gave up searching for a job, more often than among people looking for a job, there were people of ill health, and - paradoxically – people living in households where there was not a single person with permanent income (from work, pension ). Most frequently given reason for the resignation of the job search were: caring of children and the elderly (30%) and bad health (18%).

Respondents in the survey presented rather pessimistic views about their future - only 10% of them judged that they are very big or big chances of finding employment in the next 12 months, a third of them assessed chances as medium, and the rest - more than half believed that the chances of finding work are small or very small. To greater optimism were more inclined young people.

In this context, activities of labor offices are even more important. Over 2 / 3 of respondents registered in labor offices to find a work, no less important motivation was of course the desire to obtain health insurance. Respondents positively evaluated the friendliness, willingness to help and the level of competence of the workers of the labor offices. In practice, the training opportunity was offered to 89% of respondents. 39% of respondents got an offer of traineeship. 14% of respondents were interested in a training offered by employment offices, and nearly the same percentage chose to participate. With job consultancy services benefited 28% of respondents. Almost 40% of trainees found trainings

very useful for finding a job. Respondents prefer to learn the operation of cash registers and invoicing, they were also interested in acquiring the trade or office skills. Respondents were also interested in a courses of a foreign languages, especially English. Respondents expressed interest in acquiring various certificates and permissions that make it easy to get a job, including: computer skills certification ECD, driving licenses of higher categories, the permissions to drive forklift trucks and SANEPID papers which allow to work in the catering industry. The main barrier to participation in training courses for unemployed people are high costs of such trainings.

