

Cooperation of social services on behalf of social reintegration in Poland

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Introduction

The need for strengthening the cooperation of social services on behalf of social rehabilitation and integration is permanent considering the fact that social reality constantly creates new situations related to development. There are created new conditions of social integration, as well as disintegration and social exclusion of individuals and social groups. Social exclusion is both: individual and social problem, and also very costly one, therefore the actions targeted at occupational rehabilitation and social reintegration are necessary. The analysis presented in the study of Rienk Prins: "Social Exclusion – Peer Review" "Integrated Services in Rehabilitation – on coordination of organization and financing" confirms the significance of this issue for the national social policies.

A very good example constitutes the Swedish experiences presented in the Peter Wollberg's study: "Integrated Services in Rehabilitation – on Coordination of Organisation and Financing". Although the study focuses on financial coordination, it also shows significant integration areas of the services dealing in rehabilitation and social reintegration. In this context, the interesting is the programme Financial Coordination in Hisingen (DELTA), initiated in 1997. Approaching occupational rehabilitation and social reintegration from the service institutions side (Social Insurance Agency, health and medical care services, social services, national market administration) creates a plane for financial coordination of rehabilitation and social reintegration.

In the Delta project very important is the activation of the local forces (actors) in order to carry out the initiated tasks, identification of the residents' needs, which has a great significance for the development of the local community.

1. The selected Polish experiences

In Poland, a debate has been carried out concerning better coordination of the services related to occupational rehabilitation, labour market and social welfare. There are two reasons for this, i.e. the need to increase effectiveness of the process of social and occupational reintegration of the disabled, the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed persons, and the social welfare beneficiaries, as well as the need to lower the costs of services related to unemployment and social welfare.

Social welfare and other tasks in the sphere of social policy in Poland amounts to about 8.4% of the state budget expenditures in 2004; it is the third highest expenditure in the budget. It

constitutes about 1.8% of GNP. The expenditures of the Labour Fund on unemployment related services amount to about 16 billion zlotys a year. According to the Eurostat estimates, the Polish expenditures on the active forms of combating unemployment are significantly lower than the average expenditures of the 25 EU countries – only 16.2% compared to 27.6% of the total of public expenditures in the EU Member States in 2004. It indicates the need for restructuring these expenditures in order to improve the situation on the labour market.

The main task comprises organization of closer cooperation of the Powiat Labour Offices with the gmina and urban social welfare centres. In 2005, social welfare embraced 2,575 thousand people (1,573 families), while unemployment was the main reason for providing aid to 853 thousand families which amounted to the overall of 2,839 thousand people. Therefore, a closer coordination of activities carried out by Powiat Labour Offices, Social Welfare Centres, Social Integration Centres, Powiat Centres for Family Aid and NGOs is necessary in order to increase economic activation of the unemployed. It concerns mainly training, occupational re-qualification, or employment of the unemployed and their achievement of economic independency.

The actions must be spatially differentiated. The registered unemployment rate in Poland in the second quarter of 2006 comprised about 16%, while the number of unemployed persons amounted to about 2,488 thousand. In Poland, there are about 338 Powiat Labour Offices; there are 2478 gminas situated in the powiats. A few or several gminas are in each powiat. There is a social welfare centre in each gmina. There are urban gminas/powiats with one social welfare centre beside the Powiat Labour Office. In each case, cooperation with a labour office takes different course; in towns, it is more efficient, while in Powiats covering many gminas it is more difficult. There are taken actions targeted at establishing closer cooperation of the labour office personnel with the social welfare centres, or even relocation of some labour office workers to social welfare centres in order to consolidate cooperation of both services and increasing employment among the unemployed beneficiaries of social welfare.

The surveys and preliminary analyses in two powiats indicate that the process of gaining economic independence in case of the social welfare beneficiaries is too slow. Only about 10% of beneficiaries take work, of which about 5% re-enter the social welfare system during the first year after gaining independence. Therefore, there is a necessity to find more effective legal, organizational, and financial solutions is necessary, which would strengthen social and occupational reintegration of this category of people.

The functioning of the social welfare system and the respective expenditures, increasingly often become a subject of public debate; in the pilot surveys carried out in the selected local communities, about one third of the residents indicate the need to rationale expenditures on social welfare, particularly the need for more adequate distribution of benefits.

A particularly important problem, which draws attention, poses increasing employment of the disabled persons in the open working establishments, which provide them with the best chances for the fastest possible economic stabilization and integration with working community and local community.

The issue of coordination between various social services constitutes a significant element in both: construction of the social support system for persons threatened with social exclusion (e.g. the disabled, women re-entering labour market, the youth), as well as taking targeted actions leading to social and occupational integration of these people.

In Poland in 2002, there were 5,457 thousand of disabled persons, who comprised 14.3% of the population. Disabled persons aged 15-64 years comprise 13% of the total number of the population at that age. The economic activity rate of disabled persons amounted to 19.2%, as compared to 55% rate of the total population. The employment rate for the working disabled persons amounted to 14.4%, while for the total population – 44.1%. This indicates resources and possibilities for including a significant part of disabled people into employment following effective rehabilitation and training activities, as well as adjustment of establishments and within establishments workplaces to the needs of disabled persons.

Two concluded research programmes concerning this issue indicate positive experiences. The first one (carried out in 1999) covered 188 open working establishments, including 99 ones employing 441 disabled persons. The results of this survey indicate lack of significant social barriers and barriers in physical working conditions limiting employment of the disabled. The survey was conducted by the Research-Development Centre for the Disabled in Warsaw.

The second programme: “Union Promotion and Security of Equality in Employment” ZORON (carried out within the framework of the European Community Initiative EQUAL – financed from EFS) is currently at the stage of preparation of the report on the first phase of the survey. It covered 44 large open working establishments, which employ about 48 thousand people. In the survey participated over 2000 employees, in which over 500 comprised disabled persons. The objective of this programme is stimulation of growth in employment of the disabled in these and other establishments. The survey was carried out by the Polish Society for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.

According to the information, in 2006 employment of the disabled in open establishments increased by about 20 thousand persons, despite a high level of unemployment in Poland, which confirms gradual occupational activation of disabled persons.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy carries out works targeted at elaboration of the model of functioning of the institutions facilitating occupational reintegration of women who left employment for various reasons. Beside the above mentioned actions (labour offices, social welfare centres, social integration centres in gminas, NGOs) there are carried out works concerning the system aiding the caretaking function of family by public institutions (crèches, kindergartens, after-lessons primary school programmes, NGOs assistance), which should allow women taking paid work more frequently. This issue has a chance to become one of the priorities in the state social policy.

Among the groups included in the re-integration actions belong also the youth staying outside employment. The unemployment rate among young people aged up to 24 years amounted in the second quarter of 2006 about 30% (according to the Labour Force Survey). The activities within

this area undertake standard institutions (labour offices, social welfare centres), as well as special programmes, e.g. initiated by Voluntary Labour Corps.

Actions aimed at inclusion cover also persons who after a period of re-socialization due to various reasons (e.g. after serving prison sentence, because of alcoholism, drug addiction, and other cases). They are mainly taken care of by specialist centres, labour market institutions, and social welfare centres. The Law of 13 June 2003 on Social Employment enables reintegration of the socially excluded persons (long-term unemployed, addicted to drugs and alcohol, mentally ill, released from penal institutions) *inter alia* through opening centres and clubs of social integration. The integration centres may be established by gminas and non-governmental organizations. Cooperation with the employers and local communities facilitates comeback of the excluded persons to social and occupational life. The participants of the centres' activities improve their personal and family situation, and most of all, they gain independence. In the process of solving problems related to social welfare and reintegration intensively participate NGOs.

The above mentioned issues of social exclusion and social reintegration are solved within the framework of the Strategy of Social Policy for the years 2003-2013.

2. Selected national research programmes concerning social exclusion

The theme of coordination of social services activities is also included in the initiated surveys concerning social exclusion.

A few research programmes concerning exclusion and social reintegration is carried out in Poland. One of them is the nation-wide programme "Poverty and social exclusion and methods of combating them" organized by the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs in Warsaw.

The other programme is carried out by the UNDP in Warsaw. It comprises monitoring of social exclusion and evaluation of the social integration policies in the context of sustainable development.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy initiated in the years 1997-1999 the research "Socio-Medical Needs of the Population in Selected Regions" focused at finding factors which would increase effectiveness of cooperation between social welfare centres, family doctors and community nurses in the area of reducing various forms of social exclusion. The research was carried out by the Institute of Social Economy of the Warsaw School of Economics.

The Institute of Social Economy completed also a research programme on the nation-wide sample "Socio-economic situation of unemployed women and barriers and stimulators of their occupational activation", which determined main difficulties in occupational reintegration of unemployed women.

Conclusion

Recapitulating the above experiences in the context of all materials prepared for the meeting of the Peer Countries, the following may be stated:

- Particular countries have their own experience and effects in solving the problems of social and occupational reintegration of persons and groups suffering social exclusion. Without a doubt, a positive effect of the Gothenburg meeting will be the opportunity to get acquainted with these experiences and exchange of views, which may contribute to the appliance of good practices in the analysed area.
- The system of social policy in Poland has been transformed since 1990, nevertheless, its final model has not been established yet. However, the legislative work has been carried out aiming at improvement of functioning of public institutions in particular areas of social services. The analyses and research on social exclusion, social reintegration of persons who entered the group of the excluded are carried out within the framework of the National Strategy of Social Integration for Poland. Based on this, even incomplete recognition of the reality, a search for better solutions in practice leading towards higher effectiveness of actions on behalf social reintegration continues. Unfortunately, a road to full success is still long. A significant role in recognition of social exclusion and processes of social reintegration /rehabilitation should be played by the local studies on the discussed phenomena.
- The presented Swedish example concentrates to large extent on the aspect of financial coordination of institutions. In the hitherto debate carried out in Poland, this plane is also included, although the key importance plays better support and more effective aid for people threatened with social exclusion.
- One of the basic elements determining effective actions targeted at social reintegration and ensuring that the provided aid is addressed more adequately is coordination of cooperation between social services. In Poland, many obstacles hindering effective coordination of actions of various institutions active in the area of social and occupational integration have been identified. They are barriers of institutional character, as well as deriving from the specifics of the tasks (different approach to clients/beneficiaries, various objectives of institutions). Institutions on the local level sometimes initiate effective cooperation of informal character. In the context of definition of the shape of social policy in our country, as well as in relation to the participation of our country in the EU initiatives a debate is carried out concerning working out the model of such cooperation.