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**YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE LABOR MARKET
AS A CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL POLICY
IN SELECTED POLISH VOIVODESHIPS**

**MŁODZI LUDZIE NA RYNKU PRACY JAKO
WYZWANIE DLA POLITYKI SPOŁECZNEJ
WYBRANYCH POLSKICH WOJEWÓDZTW**

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Summary: People under the age of 25 years old belong to the so-called group of people at a “special situation” on the labor market. This means that they have severe difficulties in entering and operating on this market. This results in a certain socioeconomic consequences – both for individuals and for society as a whole, which will bear the cost of social security. Under the conditions of the growing phenomenon of an aging population, there seems to be a need to take specific actions that will allow for the development of currently available labor resources – both at the international, national, and regional levels. The purpose of this article is to analyze and rate the strategic documents of selected regions of interest from the point of view discussed problems and proposed solutions.

Keywords: young people, social policy, regional strategies, labor market.

Streszczenie: Osoby w wieku poniżej 25 roku życia należą do tzw. grupy osób znajdujących się w „szczególnej sytuacji” na rynku pracy. Oznacza to, że mają one poważne trudności z wejściem i utrzymaniem się na tym rynku. Powoduje to określone konsekwencje społeczno-ekonomiczne – zarówno dla tych osób, jak i dla całego społeczeństwa, które ponosi koszty zabezpieczenia społecznego. W warunkach nasilającego się zjawiska starzenia się społeczeństwa, koniecznością wydaje się podjęcie określonych działań, które pozwolą na zagospodarowanie wolnych obecnie zasobów siły roboczej – tak na szczeblu międzynarodowym, krajowym, jak i regionalnym. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza i ocena dokumentów strategicznych wybranych województw z punktu widzenia zainteresowania poruszaną problematyką i proponowanych rozwiązań.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi ludzie, polityka społeczna, strategie regionalne, rynek pracy.

1. Introduction

Work which is one of the basic factors of production is understood as the economic activity of people, whose aim is to produce specific products and services [Kasprzyk 2006]. It performs three basic functions: economic (creation of the social product), income (getting income) and social (to satisfy professional and social aspirations) [Danecka, Słowik, Wencel 1995]; hence, its absence causes significant perturbations, for both economy and society. In the case of the under-utilization of this factor, there appears unemployment, understood as a state of imbalance between demand and supply side of the labor market. It is a state of “lack of gainful employment among persons who are in a certain age group, set mostly by the lower and upper limit of working age who are capable and ready to work, and the job seeking” [Staszewska 2012]. Group of people out of work is not a homogeneous group. This community is diverse in terms of age, gender, education and place of residence. Age criterion allows us to distinguish several groups of the unemployed, out of which two (below 25 and above 50 years of age) are included in the so-called Polish legislation – groups in a particular situation on the labor market.

Due to the fact that the phenomenon of unemployment causes both the effects of economic, social, psychological and political nature, tackling unemployment is a major challenge for the actions of public authorities. Labor market policy is a kind of “therapy used in the case of imbalance” of the market [Wiśniewski 2002]. This policy is carried out by public authorities at practically all the levels of organization, including the regional level. Among its objectives, one should mention first of all objectives such as: employment, structural, and social production. These objectives are focused on direct reduction of unemployment, social security and increase productivity of existing manpower resources [Danecka 2005]. This applies largely to unemployed groups which are in a special situation on the labor market, among other things young people.

The aim of this study is to answer the question to what extent public authorities at the regional level in Poland perceive the problem of unemployment among people under 25 years of age and whether they take action, especially in the long term, to reduce the adverse trends. The analysis included the development of strategic documents (strategy development, strategy of social policy) of the five voivodeships where the first half of 2014 years recorded the highest (Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie) and the lowest (Wielkopolskie, Mazowieckie, Śląskie) unemployment.

2. Young unemployed and the policy of the public authorities

According to the Eurostat data, harmonized unemployment rate among young people (age 15–24) in mid-2014 was as follows: for the whole European Union (28) – 21.9%, while for Poland – 23.4% [epp.eurostat]. These figures significantly (more than twice) exceed the rates of unemployment in the whole population (UE 28 – 9.8%, Poland – 8.7%). However, in the Polish regions, the unemployment rate

in mid-2014 for the voivodeships with the lowest unemployment rate was at the level of 8.3% (Wielkopolskie), 10.2% (Mazowieckie, Śląskie), 16.2% (Kujawsko-Pomorskie) and 19.0% (Warmińsko-Mazurskie) – in relation to the voivodeships with the highest level of unemployment [GUS 2014]. It is worth noting that in these regions the percentage of unemployed people under the age of 25 years was comparable and was approximately 17%. Only exception was Śląskie voivodeship, where the young unemployed accounted for 13.7% of all unemployed.

A major problem for the unemployed under the age of 25 is mainly the difficulty in entering the labor market. There is no smooth transition from education (medium or higher) to a group of people in the labor force, which means a process of “wasting” the existing potential of young, often well-educated people [*Strategia Rozwoju Kapitału Ludzkiego 2020*]. This is due primarily to the lack of professional experience and results in either a lack of any work or the possibility of taking up employment not associated with a learned profession, and lower paid, and thus unsatisfactory. Following the lead among other things to strengthen migration trends will eventually weaken the domestic labor market as well as change the functioning of Polish families (subsequent empowerment of young people, postponing a decision to start a family and have children). From the point of view of an aging population and the need for efficient use of the existing labor force, these phenomena cannot be ignored and require specific and long-term actions of the public authorities. These actions should be measured in two ways. The actions should primarily create conditions facilitating the entry of young people into the labor market. However – what is also important – young people should ensure an adequate preparation (increase qualification and competence) within an effective education system.

According to the European policy, integration of young people for a long time is a priority. Already Lisbon Strategy (2000) among its key activities takes into account the growth of employment and change of the social model, consisting in *inter alia* increasing activity, a more flexible labor market and improving education. These directions were fixed after modifications (2005) in the framework of the Lisbon Agenda, which among the three key areas of action listed the creation of more and better jobs (involvement of more people into employment, increase investment in human capital by improving education systems). The current Europe 2020 Strategy focuses on five main purposes, out of which up to two (employment, education) are associated with the young generation in the labor market. These objectives are aimed at achieving employment in the age group 20–74 years old to 75% and reduce the number of early school leavers to less than 10%.

Implementation of the priorities under the Europe 2020 Strategy in EU Member States takes place in the framework of the National Reform Programs (NRP). NRP records for the years 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 – in terms of reducing unemployment, especially among young people – as the main aims (at least in part on a group of persons under 25 years of age) enlists: to reduce to 4.5% the proportion of early school leavers, as well as increase employment in the age group 20–74 to the level of

71% [*Krajowy Program Reform... 2013/2014*]. To achieve these goals – for a group of young people – systemic projects are developed (including “Young in the labor market,” “Youth Skills Academy II,” “New Perspective,” “The first business – support to start”) projects implemented by social partners (for example, “Link to the Future. Young. Internet. Career”), the creation of new centers of vocational training, as well as the launching Electronic Stimulation Centre for Youth (ECAM).

An important element of the activities foreseen in 2014 for all EU Member States is the realization of the so-called “Youth Guarantee” aimed at supporting young people in the process of entering the labor market. In the case of Poland, the activities in this area will be directed primarily to shorten the waiting time for jobs, additional activation activities (including training and the employment vouchers, grants for teleworking, tripartite contract training) and commissioning a loan system for students and graduates [*Krajowy Program Reform... 2014/2015*].

Priorities adopted at the national level also must translate into lower organizational levels. It is worth noting that Polish laws that govern the employment and counteracting unemployment to jobs in the local government labor market policy include, among others [*Ustawa z dnia 20 kwietnia 2004 r.*]: determination and coordination of regional policy, labor market and human resource development and programming and execution of the tasks carried out by the co-financed European Social Fund. Voivodeships should coordinate specified activation programs, initiate and implement regional programs and activities involving commission. This means that each region is obliged to take specific actions – especially of a long-term nature.

3. Tackling youth unemployment in the strategic documents of selected voivodeships

The first region which is analyzed in this article is Wielkopolskie voivodeship. The diagnosis carried out in this region shows that for several years the unemployment rate has been lower than the national average and in fact the lowest in Poland. The problem that is observed by the local authorities in the region is the high percentage of unemployment among certain social groups, especially among graduates and young groups of people of working age, people with low education, women, people out of work for a long time, people not having worked yet and those living in rural areas. Parallely the phenomenon of “junk contracts” is intensifying, which supplants permanent employment, especially in the youngest age groups.

Despite the relatively good situation in Wielkopolskie voivodeship labor market issues associated with it are a challenge for the region and ideas for its improvement are both in *Zaktualizowana Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Wielkopolskiego „Wielkopolska 2020”* (ZSRWW) and *Strategia Polityki Społecznej dla Województwa Wielkopolskiego do 2020 roku* (SPSWW). Both the strategic and operating objectives apply in a very general manner to the issues of employment and do not take particularly into account the problem of young people in the labor market.

One of the strategic objectives of ZSRWW is to increase the competence of residents and the level of their employment. This objective should be achieved through a number of activities that can be helpful also to people under 25 years of age. These activities are primarily the development of access to education and improving its terms, continuing education, vocational guidance system, guidance on their own business and the development of financial instruments to support the start of this activity. Moreover, the region wants to pursue this objective through the promotion of strategic social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship based on knowledge or a promotion of system of scholarships and internships [*Zaktualizowana Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Wielkopolskiego...*].

In the case developed on the basis of social diagnosis *SPSWW*, in addition to references to the traditional areas of social policy (health, social security, social assistance), other issues were taken into account, such as the development of children and youth, strengthening families, housing and employment, together with their associated benefits, education and the labor market, public safety, as well as culture, communication and leisure time activities. In addition, strategic priorities have been written out, such as operational objectives and tasks aimed at children and teenagers, seniors, people with limited skills and people with high-risk social circle. It is worth emphasizing that *SPSWW* developed operational objectives and tasks of local social policy, which can be helpful in the creation and implementation of local programs of social policy. In a general way, without paying attention to young people, a reference was made to them with respect to the unemployment problem. Much attention was paid to the unemployed with disabilities and young people particularly vulnerable to a lack of work due to growing up in a family where parents are long-term unemployed [*Strategia Polityki Społecznej dla Województwa Wielkopolskiego do 2020 roku*].

Further regions which in June 2014 recorded the lowest (after Wielkopolska) unemployment (10.2%) are Śląsk and Mazowsze. In Śląskie voivodeship *Strategia Polityki Społecznej Województwa Śląskiego na lata 2006–2020* (*SPSWŚ*) was elaborated, which is the part of the priorities of the *Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Śląskiego “Śląskie 2020+”* (*SRWŚ*) and forms an integral part of it. In particular, this relationship concerns education, culture, human resource mobilization, social inclusion and health and safety. The structure of *SPSWŚ* (as in the other analyzed regions) affected both the documents of international, national and diagnosis of the social situation.

SPSWŚ corresponds to the first strategic objective of *SRWŚ*, concerning in particular the growth of the education of citizens and their adaptation abilities to social and economic change. Within this framework the region directs its actions, *inter alia*, to improve the quality and accessibility of education and its adaptation to the current and projected labor market needs, as well as to expand the scope and scale of retraining and lifelong learning.

The diagnosis of the demographic situation and prepared forecasts show that in the analyzed voivodeship by 2030 the highest rate of productive population burdened with

unproductive population will have been recorded. It also provides for the increase of the share of childless widowed and lonely, which will be connected with the necessity of the use of institutional forms of assistance. The voivodeship seeks to prevent these problems and solve them using SPSWŚ, which is carried out under the operational programs defining specific objectives, tasks, responsible parties, and methods of financing. In Śląskie voivodeship a number of strategic objectives were proposed, *inter alia*: strengthening family policy of equal opportunities and educational upbringing of children and young people, support for the elderly in the performance of social roles and preventing social exclusion. It should be noted, however, that in SPSWŚ the problem of young people in the labor market was not treated as the key one [*Strategia Polityki Społecznej Województwa Śląskiego na lata 2006–2020*].

Similarly, SRWŚ does not pay attention to the issues related to employment among young people. On the basis of a developed SWOT analysis, which was performed based on the diagnosis of the socio-economic analysis of programs and policies, and taking into account major trends of European and national policy development, specific priorities, strategic objectives, courses of action and projects were set. One of the priorities named “Śląskie voivodeship as a region of new economy, creating the technologies and effectively absorbing” overlaps with the issues raised in this article, namely with corresponding strategic objective A.1. addresses the issues of adapting education to the needs of residents on the labor market and the globalizing economy, improving skills, abilities and population activity [*Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Śląskiego „Śląskie 2020+”*].

Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Mazowieckiego do 2030 roku (SRWM) was established on the basis of experience with the implementation of the previous strategy and the issues that emerged during the previous and current programming period. The document is a response to the challenges with which the region must cope to improve the quality of life, reduce social exclusion and unemployment, to pursue a policy of territorial cohesion and a policy of smart and sustainable development. Due to the large spatial variations of the Mazowieckie voivodeship development, it is necessary to pursue a policy of reducing these disparities. The overall objective of SRWM is therefore territorial cohesion, defined as a reduction of development disparities and the growing importance of the Metropolitan Area of Warsaw in Europe, which in turn will improve the life quality of residents.

The diversity of the region is clearly visible also in the analysis of unemployment rates. Despite the fact that in recent years it has been relatively low, and by 2010 was generally the lowest in Poland, in the region there is the problem of unemployment, which particularly applies to the residents of remote districts of the capital. A diagnosis carried out by the voivodeship shows that particularly vulnerable to unemployment are people aged 18–24 entering the job market and those who do not have sufficient professional preparation and people over 55 years of age, who cannot keep up with technological changes and have the lowest spatial mobility. Although the authorities in the region are aware of the problems of young people on the labor market, this

document does not set out specific actions aimed at solving them. SRWM in a general way indicated the need of vocational training of young people, the need to adapt education and training systems to labor market needs, to promote entrepreneurial attitudes and self-employment or outplacement support for people leaving agriculture.

The situation is similar in the case of the analysis of the project of *Strategia Polityki Społecznej Województwa Mazowieckiego* (SPSWM), which also in general and more comprehensive treated the matters relating to the strengthening of the system of regional coordination of the implementation of public policies for the unemployment problem.

The second group of regions analyzed in this study is formed by voivodeships with the highest unemployment: Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeships. In Warmia and Mazury in 2013 *Strategia Rozwoju Społeczno-Gospodarczego Województwa Warmińsko-Mazurskiego do roku 2025* (SRWWM) was updated and adopted. The diagnosis is clear that the region for several years has been characterized by the highest unemployment rates registered in the country – more than 20% and the particularly difficult situation occurs among young people. Furthermore, the problem is the highest in Poland (52%) percentage of households that do not have aspirations for children living in these households to complete their higher school. Hardly comforting is the low share of unemployed with higher education (one of the lowest in Poland – 8.5%), because it is not associated with the implementation of specific solutions for this social group, but it is the result of the migration of people to other regions.

Regional authorities recognizing the above presented problems in SRWWM in one of the four strategic objectives raised issues related to the reduction of unemployment, but, as in the above-mentioned regions, they did not also give priority to any age group, including persons under 25 years of age. In particular, they focused on increasing the number of jobs through the introduction of incentives for maintaining and increasing employment in companies, organizing better cooperation between enterprises and universities and vocational schools in order to better match the profile of teaching to the requirements of the economy, promoting the development of science and technology parks as well as consulting conditions for starting and running a business [*Strategia Rozwoju Społeczno-Gospodarczego Województwa Warmińsko-Mazurskiego do roku 2025*].

In this region in recent years sectoral strategies have also been developed, one of which is the updated *Strategia Polityki Społecznej Województwa Warmińsko-Mazurskiego do 2020 roku* (SPSWWM), which was adopted in 2012. The consequence of the adoption of the vision was to determine the main purpose of SPSWWM: “Individuals and families from Warmia and Mazury, their local environment and the institutional environment interact with each other and are committed to strengthening integration as well as social and professional activation.” In order to comprehensively fulfill the main objective of SPSWWM, four key priorities were adopted. One of them concerns the promotion of the professional and educational activity and mobility of

the unemployed. Within this priority several operational objectives were set which in turn relate to young people, those aged 50+, unemployed and disabled long-term unemployed people. The document presented concrete actions aiming to ensure that young unemployed people have qualifications more relevant to the changing needs of the labor market and are more active and mobile professionals. In particular, these actions were based on the implementation of programs and projects involving organizations, training, career counseling and social activism of young people through volunteering [*Strategia Polityki Społecznej Województwa Warmińsko-Mazurskiego do 2020 roku*].

In recent years, in Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship we have also noted one of the highest rates of registered unemployment. Despite the fact that work on the strategy of social policy in the region is in progress, so from the created in the region in 2013 strategy *Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Kujawsko-Pomorskiego do roku 2020 – Plan Modernizacji 2020+* (SRWKP) follows that the authorities recognize the problem, because in addition to the challenges and problems characteristic of all Polish regions which, *inter alia*, include an aging population, the desire to increase innovation and networking, the document indicates specific problems, challenges for the region and proposed solutions. From the point of view of combating unemployment as the most important priority one should consider improving the competitiveness of the economy, which is likely to significantly increase the number of jobs in the voivodeship. In SRWKP in particular a reference was made to the need to promote labor and hiring people who are in a special situation on the labor market, including young people, women and people in the age group 50+. The issues of the adaptation to labor market needs were given very much attention under the objective “Active society and efficient service.” It should be also noted that the basic tool for the implementation of SRWKP is the development programs and one of the obligatory (adopted annually) document *Kujawsko-Pomorski Plan Działań na Rzecz Zatrudnienia*, which clearly indicates the need to combat youth unemployment. The region has proposed a number of measures to help young people – from creating a model of obtaining housing stock in major cities to satisfying housing needs of young families through the development and implementation of scholarships for the most capable young people, assistance in active job search, activities to improve professional qualifications and making them better suited to the needs of the labor market, or the promotion of self-employment [*Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Kujawsko-Pomorskiego do roku 2020 – Plan Modernizacji 2020+*].

4. Conclusions

The substantive content analysis of strategic documents in the selected voivodeships allowed drawing a number of conclusions. First, all the regions recognized general problems associated with unemployment. Second, in all the analyzed documents the case of the unemployed was raised, but only in the voivodeships with high

unemployment rates measures targeted at specific age groups were proposed. This took place in the following voivodeships: Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie. In the other regions under study the problem of youth unemployment was not specifically articulated. Third, not all analyzed regions developed strategies of social policy, which certainly could refer more broadly to the problems of the labor market. In addition, what is noteworthy is the fact that apart from the strategic documents voivodeships create even yearly regional action plans for employment. In the studied regions all the plans more or less related to the issue of youth unemployment on the labor market. A perfect example is the plan of Wielkopolskie voivodeship, which emphasized the need to implement measures aimed at young people, in accordance with the recommendations of the Council of the EU on “Youth Guarantee.”

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