

**Work Package 4**  
**Multilevel “Arenas” for Fighting Poverty and Social Exclusion**  
**National report Poland**

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## Abbreviations

AGS – Annual Growth Survey

CRS – Country Specific Recommendations

NRP – National Reform Programme

ME – Ministry of Economy

MLSP – Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

MNE – Ministry of National Education

SI OMC – Social Inclusion Open Method of Coordination

ECOFIN – Economic and Financial Affairs Council

EPSCO – Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

## **Foreword**

Reducing poverty and social exclusion is one of the main challenges for ensuring social cohesion in Europe. The research project COPE – Combating Poverty in Europe: Re-organising Active Inclusion through Participatory and Integrated Modes of Multilevel Governance’ – analyses trends of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, and examines the dynamics of minimum income protection policies that potentially help alleviate the risk of poverty in Europe. A particular focus is on the situation of single parents, long-term unemployed and the working poor, who face particular risks of poverty and social exclusion. To what extent have minimum income policies functioned as last resort social security for these three groups, and in what sense can ‘active inclusion’ policies credited with protecting them from poverty and social exclusion?

Co-financed by the European Commission in the 7th Framework Programme, the COPE project unites researchers and stakeholders from six European countries, the UK, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and Norway. Having started in February 2012, COPE runs over a three-year period. COPE’s method is comparative – analysing developments in five European countries (Poland, Germany, UK, Sweden and Italy). Its focus is inherently multi-level, looking in turn at developments at European, national and local level.

## Section A: The Europe 2020 Anti-poverty Arena

### 1. Introduction

The report focuses on the effects of anti-poverty policy resulting from Europe 2020 strategy which emerge at the national level. Three hypotheses were formulated in the guidelines to the report:

- 1. First, we may expect that, compared to the OMC-Lisbon phase, the Europe 2020 strategy is more likely to produce effects in the political sphere. Accordingly, we assume that the issue of (the fight against) poverty may have become more salient at the domestic level and/or European target/indicators have been more openly discussed - and then accepted or rejected by the various national actors. Although we expect a limited direct influence on policy changes at the national level, in some cases agenda shifts and revision of national legislation may also have resulted from national-supranational interactions within the Europe 2020 framework (NRPs, CSRs).*
- 2. Second, at least in theory, we might expect increased cross-sector and cross-departmental coordination – i.e. more integration – in line with the new overarching framework for policy coordination. By contrast, the switch from the Social OMC to Europe 2020 and its implementation should have represented a step back with respect to both multi-level and multi-stakeholder involvement in governance processes.*
- 3. Third, we may also expect that, from the first to the third annual cycle, the Europe 2020 arena has become more participatory – with regard to involvement of both stakeholders and levels of government – as well as more integrated mostly due to increased problem pressure in most MS, the above mentioned effects in the political sphere (i.e. our first hypothesis) and supranational actions aimed at reinforce governance mechanisms (Jessoula, Sabato 2013: 5-6).*

Those hypotheses will be verified in the next parts of the report, taking into consideration two types of possible effects, that may occur at the domestic level: procedural effects which refer to changes in governance and policy making – especially in terms of policy integration and actors' participation; and substantial effects related to changes in legislation and political discourses or ideational shifts (see Barcevicus, Weishaupt, Zeitlin 2014).

Before we proceed with the analysis, it is important to make a few stipulations concerning the specific context of the Polish study. The process of implementation of Europe 2020 in Poland should be analysed taking into consideration the relatively recent accession of the country to the EU. The less than a decade of EU membership has been a period of adjusting to new requirements: except from legal and organisational changes – which were carried out mostly in the pre-accession period – it required also developing new “ways of doing things”, i.e. drafting strategic documents and operational programmes, preparing systems of

implementation for EU funds, gathering new types of data, etc. But most importantly it was a period of learning how to reconcile national priorities with EU priorities and how to negotiate own position.

Another crucial context of Poland's membership in the EU is the paramount importance of the EU funds. In case of Poland – similarly to the other post-communist countries – accession meant an immense developmental opportunity. Thus, many of the Polish – EU relations should be considered against the background of cohesion policy, which has been an inherent element of modernisation.

The abovementioned factors have twofold consequences for implementation of Europe 2020 – also in its anti-poverty aspect. First of all, there seems to be a tendency towards compliance with European Semester's requirements and the Country Specific Recommendations. It is based on a conviction that Poland – as a country which wants to catch up with the more developed EU member states – should not be a “red flag”. Yet, as we will show in the next sections, it does not mean a simple cause and effect relationship, i.e. Poland carries out what is recommended.

Second of all, Europe 2020 was perceived – among other things – as another opportunity to secure Polish interests concerning EU funding. Thus, National Reform Programme was used to state the importance of cohesion policy and the new financial perspective for fulfilment of Europe 2020 targets.

Finally, what makes Poland quite exceptional among other EU member states is the relatively limited influence of the recent economic crisis on the overall socio-economic situation. As we will show – it should be interpreted as an economic slowdown, rather than actual crisis. In consequence, Poland – contrary to the last developments at the EU level (European Commission 2014) has nearly achieved the national quantitative target concerning reduction of poverty.

The structure of the report is the following. In the next part, we will present background information about Polish social model and the existing problem pressures. Apart from that, the past Social Inclusion OMC experiences will be discussed. In the third part, the three cycles of implementation of Europe 2020 will be accounted for and in the fourth part, the overall influence of this process on participation of actors in policy-making and integration of anti-poverty policy with other policy areas will be analysed. Fifth part is devoted to the reception of Europe 2020 (in its anti-poverty dimension) at the local level, based on the case study of Radom carried out in the framework of WP6 of the COPE project. Finally, in the sixth section more generalised effects of the process of implementation of Europe 2020 will be problematized.

Two sources of information were used in the analysis: documents connected to European Semester and expert interviews conducted with administration officials, politicians, social and third sector partners (see Table 1).

**Table 1: List of the interviews cited in the report**

<b>List of interviews conducted at the national level (February 2013) cited in the report</b>	
1.	Interview 1 - Polish administration official
2.	Interview 2 Polish administration official
3.	Interview 3 - dyad with Polish administration officials <sup>1</sup>
4.	Interview 4- Polish administration official
5.	Interview 5 - triad with Polish administration officials
6.	Interview 6- Polish administration official
7.	Interview 7 - social partner
8.	Interview 8 - Civil Society Organisation
<b>List of interviews conducted at the local level (June and July 2013) cited in the report</b>	
1.	Interview 9- local Civil Society Organisation
2.	Interview 10 - local Civil Society Organisation
3.	Interview 11- representative of local authorities
<b>List of interviews conducted for doctoral thesis (May 2010 – June 2013) cited in the report</b>	
1.	Interview 12 - Polish administration official
2.	Interview 13- expert
3.	Interview 14 - Polish administration official
4.	Interview 15 – expert
5.	Interview 16 – expert
6.	Interview 17 - Polish administration official

**Note:** <sup>1</sup> Interview carried out in April 2014.

## **2. The Background**

### **2.1 The National Model of Combating Poverty**

The emergence of poverty as a phenomenon affecting larger parts of the population was a by-product of Poland's transition from centrally planned to market economy. The value of real salaries and savings decreased with the hyperinflation caused by the release of prices; privatisation of state owned companies and the introduction of market mechanisms into the process of employing and dismissing labour force resulted in the occurrence of unemployment – a phenomenon which did not formally exist in the previous system defined by full employment<sup>1</sup>.

The first half of the 1990s was characterised by the high and increasing percentage of population under the threat of poverty associated by the rising unemployment rate (see figure 1). Thus, the systems of social assistance and combating unemployment had to be built from the scratch to answer the growing problems. A generous and inclusive unemployment benefits together with an expanded early retirement system were introduced.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the cases of people not in employment (or education) were in fact marginal (it was ideologically condemned by real socialism), there was a phenomenon of hidden unemployment understood as overemployment: too many people were employed to perform tasks in particular workplaces.



**Figure 1: Unemployment rate in Poland in years 1990-2000**



Sources: GUS: [http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840\\_677\\_PLK\\_HTML.htm](http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_677_PLK_HTML.htm).

Situation stabilised and improved in the second half of the 1990s. Unemployment figures as well as the number of people living below the social minimum decreased. Although the relative poverty rate has risen, but it was connected to the increase of median and mean of well-being<sup>2</sup>. Yet, the group of extremely poor enlarged gradually in that period even though it remained quite small (Szulc 2006).

The improvement of economic situation resulted in the implementation of retrenchment policy (Inglot 2008). Unemployment benefits were reduced and access to them limited. Most of the unemployed had been shifted to the social assistance system – already overburdened with tasks and offering only minimum financial support.

**Table 2: Replacement rate of unemployment benefits (to average salary) in years 1995, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2009**

Year	Replacement rate
1995	32.4
1999	21.8
2000	21.9
2005	21.5
2009	18.3

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 1997, Table 3(232), Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 2010, Table 12 (195)

From the second half of the 1990s a residual model of combating poverty has started to emerge. It is characterised by low MIP transfers: according to the data of the Ministry of Labour and Social policy (MLSP) the average amount of benefit granted because of unemployment equalled 274 PLN (approx. 62<sup>3</sup> euro) in 2011 (MPiPS 2012). The access to MIP transfers is limited in result of the fact that poverty thresholds are set at the level close to

<sup>2</sup> Household well-being was measured on the basis of equivalent income and consumption-related expenditure. Expenditures was defined as “a sum of all consumption-related expenses, including durables plus consumption from one’s own household’s production”. Net disposable income was defined by: labour income, social transfers (with pensions), income from self-employment and capital income. (see Szulc 2006: 425).

<sup>3</sup> Conversion rate from 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2011, 0.2264. Applied in case of all other conversions.

the subsistence minimum<sup>4</sup>. Apart from that, also replacement rate of unemployment benefits to average salary as well as number of people collecting them is kept at a low level: according to the data of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy only 16.7% of the unemployed were collecting benefits in the end of December 2012 (MPiPS 2013).

In the context of EU accession some changes have been introduced to that model. First of all, labour market policy was rescaled into more active with greater funds invested in ALMP instruments. Basic MIP transfer – previously optional – became guaranteed in particular cases. However, poverty threshold remained near the subsistence minimum. Although, according to legal provisions, the thresholds should have been verified every three years there was no valorisation in 2009<sup>5</sup>, which additionally limited the already restricted access to MIP payments (see table 2). In result, in 2011 the poverty threshold dropped below the subsistence minimum.

**Table 3: Income criteria in the period of 2004-2012.**

<b>Year in which defined</b>	<b>One person household in PLN and EUR</b>	<b>More than one person in a household in PLN and EUR</b>
2004	461 PLN (113.02 EUR)	316 PLN (77.47 EUR)
2006	477 PLN (124.50 EUR)	351 PLN (91.62 EUR)
2012 (1 <sup>st</sup> of October)	546 PLN (133.56 EUR)	456 PLN (111.54 EUR)

**Note:** Conversion rates from 31 of December 2004, 2006 and 2012.

**Sources:** Act on social assistance form 2004; Regulation concerning verification of income criteria and cash benefits from social assistance from 2006, 2009 and 2012.

Second of all, attempts were made to increase the link between transfers and activation. On the one hand, some groups of MIP clients gained privileged access to ALMP instruments. On the other, coordination in the area of sanctions was increased – not participating in suggested activation measure might have resulted in losing MIP payments. Yet, instruments of combating poverty remain fragmented and not integrated enough – especially across social assistance and labour market policy.

## **2.2 Supranational-national relationship within the Social Inclusion OMC**

The implementation of Social Inclusion OMC in Poland should not be perceived as a homogenous period. Years 2002-2004 were quite exceptional for two reasons. First of all, the relation with EU actors was established, which had influence on later interactions in the framework of the SI OMC. Second of all, the beginning of the implementation of SI OMC coincided with general redirection of social policy. Two initiatives were especially important

<sup>4</sup> The so called Threshold of Social Intervention is the basis for setting the legal poverty threshold according to which entitlement to benefits is ascertained. It is calculated with a reference to the low-income households: first a basket of services and commodities is constructed on the basis of minimum norms and then it is compared to the expenditures of families from the first quintile of income distribution. It is always close to the existential minimum.

<sup>5</sup> The Act on social assistance uses the word “verification” not “valorisation” in the context of poverty thresholds, thus the Minister of Finance was able to freeze the threshold in 2009: “verification” does not necessarily imply rising the threshold.

in that period: preparation of Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) and National Social Inclusion Strategy 2004-2010.

Joint Inclusion Memorandum from 2003 was a document prepared by Polish administration together with European Commission as a prelude to the Social Inclusion OMC. Polish public servants engaged in the process recall it as a crucial experience, since they had to defend national priorities concerning social inclusion:

*The Commission had sometimes slightly different perspective than we had – more conventional – and that was the main challenge. I don't know if you have heard about the Roma minority we were supposed to include 150 times in JIM<sup>6</sup>. And the other interesting thing, they wanted us to take care of early school leavers<sup>7</sup>. It was because EC launched this programme directed to early school leavers which concerned to a large extent Spain and Portugal. And because we were dealing directly with the Commission's representatives from Spain and Portugal they came to the conclusion that we should take care of it too. They understood it has no sense only after we showed them statistics. We managed to explain it to them and it was a great lesson to both sides. **The bottom line is we didn't let them walk over us.** [Interview 12 - Polish administration official].*

The interviewed person – one of the main negotiators of JIM – interpreted the abovementioned situation in terms of mutual learning. It came out that it is possible to defend one's position by using rational arguments. Those abilities of public officials were honed in later communications – especially during the meetings of Social Protection Committee where NAPs were discussed: people engaged in SI OMC at the domestic level had the feeling they were constantly improving their skills connected to negotiating Polish position (Zieleńska 2013).

Also in 2003 another important document linked to SI OMC was prepared titled the National Social Inclusion Strategy 2010, engaging wide spectrum of actors. Its aim was to prepare ground for the implementation of SI OMC by mapping the area of social exclusion and setting wide spectrum of priorities. This way NSIS brought thinking in terms of social inclusion (not only combating income poverty) to the policy discourse as well as policy agenda. The first NAP/Inclusion prepared for years 2004-2006 was strongly based on the priorities developed in the framework of NSIS (Miżejewski 2010).

Four working groups consisting of officials from central administration and local governments, experts in the field of social policy and statistics and third sector partners were established. Groups dealt with different themes: diagnosis of poverty and risk of social exclusion, definition issues (how to understand social exclusion, social cohesion and poverty), existing policy initiatives referring to social inclusion, good practices of NGOs. They developed various expert evaluations, which became the foundation for NSIS.

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<sup>6</sup> The interviewee is being sarcastic here, since the Roma minority in Poland is not as numerous as for example in Hungary, Czech Republic or Slovakia. In other words, it made no sense to make it a priority of JIM. There are no exact data concerning Roma population in Poland, however in 2003 (when JIM was prepared) the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration estimated it amounted to 20 000 (in comparison to 250 000-300 000 in the Czech Republic).

<sup>7</sup> The percentage of early school leavers in Poland is lower than the average for UE15 and UE 27. In 2003 it was 6% for Poland, 18.1% for EU 15 and 16.5% for EU 27 (Eurostat).

NSIS was supported by the then then minister of economy, labour and social policy from the Democratic Left Alliance Jerzy Hausner and, thus, had high political relevance. Its more long-term and ambitious goal was to „include Poland into implementation of the Lisbon strategy in the area concerning the modernisation of the European Social Model” (Hausner 2007: 148). In other words, in order to be a full-fledged participant of the Lisbon process Poland had to be aware of its own position and priorities in the area of social inclusion.

Years 2002-2004 constituted an important shift in social policy (see section 2.1). In general, EU accession was used by political actors representing Democratic Left Alliance to introduce new instruments and arrangements (see Kozek, Kubisa, Zieleńska 2013). Some of the experts mention also the role of SI OMC in that process. They claim it was an important stimuli to introduce enforceable right minimum income (Staręga-Piasek, Wóycicka 2009).

The first experiences with SI OMC seem the more important considering the dominant conviction that accession of the new member states to the EU was a top-down and often highly conditional process, i.e. more a matter of new members states’ (NMS) subordination to requirements than a process of negotiation (Huges, Sasse, Gordon 2004; Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier 2005). Yet, introduction of SI OMC in Poland should be pictured as – on the one hand – a moment of mutual learning – on the other – a well-used window of opportunity to bring new issues to discussion about social policy as well as to the policy agenda in order to realise domestic developmental goals.

Years 2005-2010 constituted a period of downgrading political importance of the SI OMC. No minister after Hausner has ever made a political priority of it. Both National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion in years 2006-2008 and 2008-2010 were prepared at the administrative level and political level was engaged only at three stages of their approval (in different committees of the Council of Ministers).

The first of the mentioned documents was prepared under minister of labour and social policy Anna Kalata representing populist-agricultural party “Self-defence”. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was going through a period of deep personnel changes and – according to the informants<sup>8</sup> - the overall atmosphere in the organisation was bad [Interview 12 - Polish administration official; Interview 14 - Polish administration official]. Priorities of minister Kalata were not transparent to the people engaged in preparation of NSR 2006-2008. They mentioned difficulties with convincing the minister about the necessity of finalising the document [Interview 12 - Polish administration official; Interview 14 - Polish administration official; Interview 15 - expert ]. It was only after intervention at the higher levels of government hierarchy (thanks to the private contacts of one of the persons dealing directly with NSR), that the whole process was streamlined. The argument of NSR’s connection to the Operational Programme Human Capital 2007-2013<sup>9</sup> (OPHC) was used to emphasise the importance of its preparation: OPHC included priorities connected to social inclusion and health care, so it was important to make those documents compatible. Since OPHC was associated with significant financial support – in contrast to NSR – its political relevance was very high. In other words, administrative official responsible for NAP used the power of OPHC to safeguard the acceptance of NSR.

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<sup>8</sup> Interviewed to my PhD thesis.

<sup>9</sup> OPHC was the new operational programme finance from EFS. Its preparations began in 2006.

Also the last NSR did not attract much political attention. The only interest was triggered by their potential expenses. NSR 2008-2010 was prepared in the context of economic crisis in Europe. Although Poland did not experience it too roughly (see next section), the strategy of the Minister of Finance was to keep expenses on a tight leash. Thus, the costs of NSR had to be scrutinised. Eventually, the document was accepted – but with a significant delay. The most important argument for its acceptance was, that it was generally based on other – already existing – programmes and legal initiatives and it did not generate new expenses.

The last sentence of the previous paragraph refers to an important feature of the two last NSR - they did not set any new strategic goals. Priorities were selected at the administrative level to fit best into the already implemented national agenda. Then existing programmes and legal acts were matched with individual priorities. Experts questioned the purpose of preparing documents which referred just to other documents and did not bring anything new (Szarfenberg 2008).

Also the history of NSIS shows the diminishing political importance of SI OMC. The strategy was “shelved” – the government coalition led by new right-wing Law and Justice changed priorities of social policy (in National Development Plan 2003-2007) putting support of people in post-productive age and vocational integration of migrants first (Golinowska 2008: 124-125). The next, more liberal, government of Civic Platform and Polish People’s Party did not come back to the document at all – it was given a status of a “no longer valid document”<sup>10</sup>. According to the interviews the strategy lost its importance and started to be perceived by representatives of public administration as one of the many which occurred in the past [Interview 5 - triad with Polish administration officials; Interview 14 - Polish administration official]. However, due to the pressure exerted by some of the non-governmental organisations’ representatives, who regretted that it “faded away”, and due the fact that person responsible for preparation of the last NSRs considered NSIS as an important document a reference to its priorities occurred in the last NSR.

Nevertheless, the initial mobilisation around SI OMC has not been entirely thrown away. NSIS had at least one important substantive effect, i.e. resulted in change at the level of legislation. A Fund for Social Initiatives was established, which supports financially realisation of public tasks by NGOs. Moreover, the language introduced with NSIS – related to social inclusion and exclusion – has spread: it may be traced in various documents prepared by the government administration such as Operational Program Human Capital 2007-2013, draft Operational Program Knowledge, Education and Development 2014-2020 as well as local strategies of solving social problems (see Miżejewski 2010).

SI OMC had also enduring procedural effects, since it reinforced the process of consultation (Weishaupt 2014). Social and third sector partners were always engaged in preparation of NAPs – even though their influence on final documents was in most cases limited (see Wócińska, Zieleńska 2009). Also the cooperation between the Ministry of Labour of Social Policy (MLSP) and other ministries was strengthened, however, it had a very standard – bureaucratic – form, which came down to commenting on detailed issues (e.g. informing that some legal acts are to be amended soon or that some data are not up-to-date) not on

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<sup>10</sup> According to the document published by the Ministry of Regional Development: Ocena rządowych dokumentów strategicznych przyjętych w latach 1989–2006 [Assessment of government strategic documents in years 1989-2006], Warsaw, August 2007, Załącznik nr 1 Wykaz dokumentów strategicznych nieaktualnych i proponowanych do uchylecia przez Radę Ministrów, s. 56 [Appendix 1: Index of not valid strategic documents. p. 56].

substantive issues (Zieleńska 2013). As for the intra-ministerial relations, OMC forced cooperation across the existing communication channels, which were based on hierarchy and the division into specialised departments. Yet, this process has not been going so smoothly – it often required interventions on higher levels of administrative ladder (Zieleńska 2013).

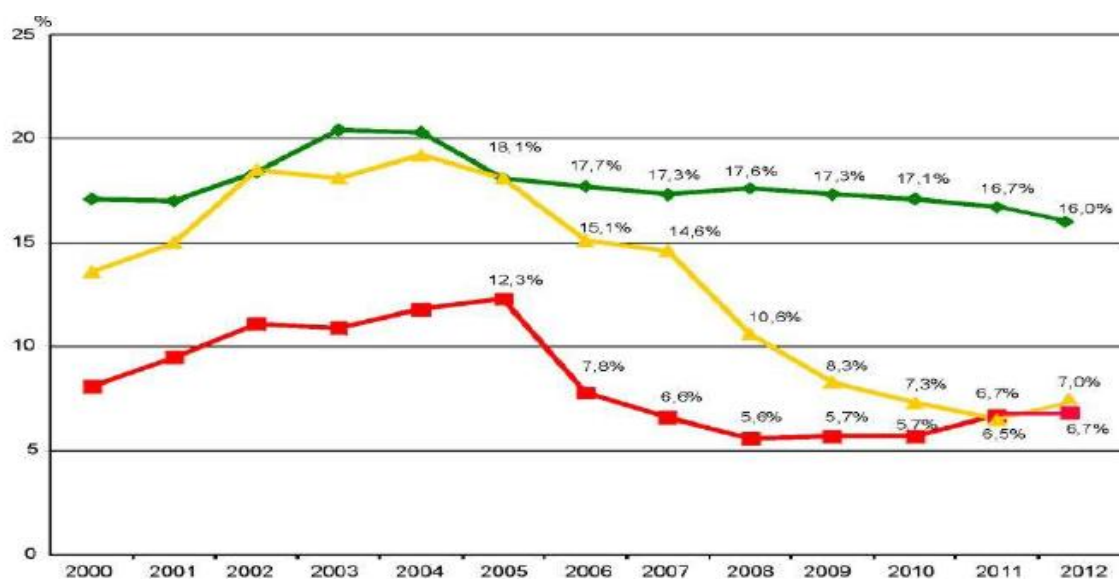
Finally, it is essential to emphasise, that not only the SI OMC, but also EU accession in general contributed strongly to opening the administration to consultation. Although there is a lot of criticism concerning the quality of those processes the last 10 years definitely changed the picture of policy planning.

### 2.3 Problem Pressure

In case of Poland three different periods should be indicated as far as problem pressure is concerned: pre-accession crisis (2000-2004), post-accession economic improvement (2005-2009) and occurrence of the signs of the economic crisis which inhibited the economic growth of the first years of EU membership (2010-2013).

In the early 2000s Poland experienced economic downturn caused by the spill-overs of the so called Russian crisis<sup>11</sup>. All poverty statistics have increased rapidly in years 2000-2004 and unemployment rate exceeded 20% in years 2003-2004 (see Figure 1 and 2).

Figure 2: At-risk-of poverty rate in Poland 2000-2012 according to Polish national statistics

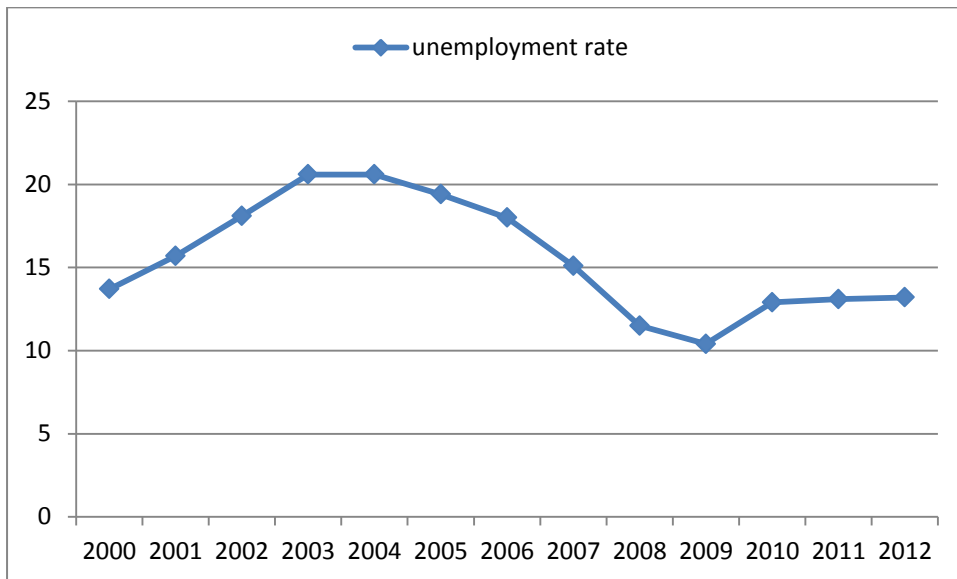


**Note:** Green – relative poverty line (below 50% of average wage); Yellow – legal poverty line; Red – absolute poverty line

**Sources:** GUS 2012

<sup>11</sup> Crisis which occurred in Russia in 1998 and spread to other eastern neighbours affected Polish export and levels of production.

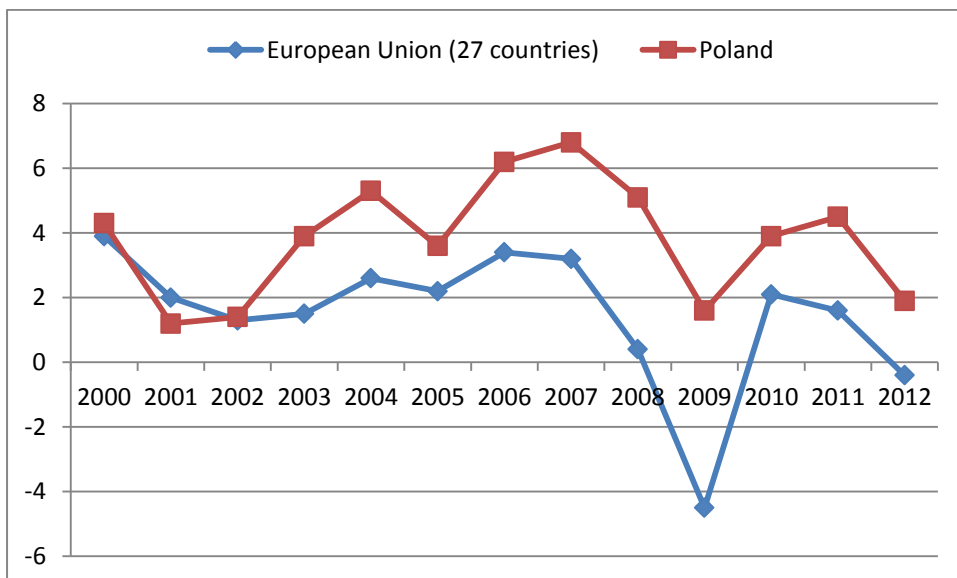
Figure 3: Unemployment in years 2000-2012



Source: Eurostat.

Although GDP began to rise from 2003 (see Figure 3), the first signs of improvement in unemployment and poverty statistics occurred only in 2005.

Figure 4: Real GDP growth in the EU 27 and Poland, years 2000-2012



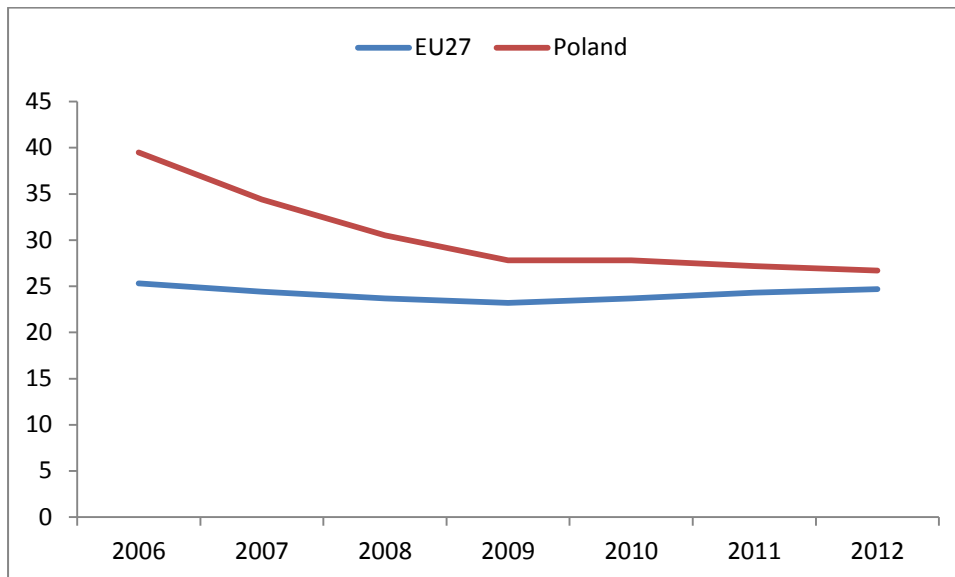
Source: Eurostat

The decrease of relative and absolute poverty<sup>12</sup> in years 2005-2009 has certainly been linked to the drop of unemployment rate in that period. It was – on the one hand – associated with the overall improvement of the economic situation (GDP growth exceeding 6% in years 2006 and 2007) and – on the other – with mass migration of Poles to other EU countries in search for work.

<sup>12</sup> Although absolute poverty has definitely decreased in 2005

The decrease of poverty is observed also as far as Europe 2020 indicators are concerned. The sharpest decrease in share of people at risk of poverty was noted in years 2006-2009, although the numbers have dropped gradually also in years 2009-2012 (see Figure 5).

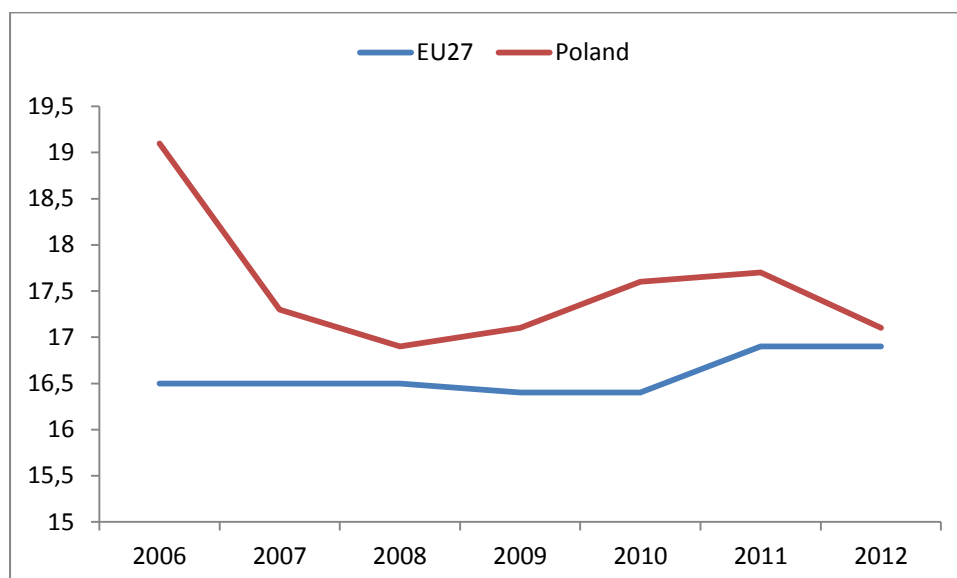
**Figure 5: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion**



Source: Eurostat.

The picture is more varied when we consider all three poverty indicators separately. The share of people at risk of poverty after social transfers dropped significantly in years 2006-2008 and increased in years 2008-2011 (figure 6). It shows that the replacement rate of transfers decreased in years 2008-2011.

**Figure 6: People at risk of poverty after social transfers, Poland and EU27**



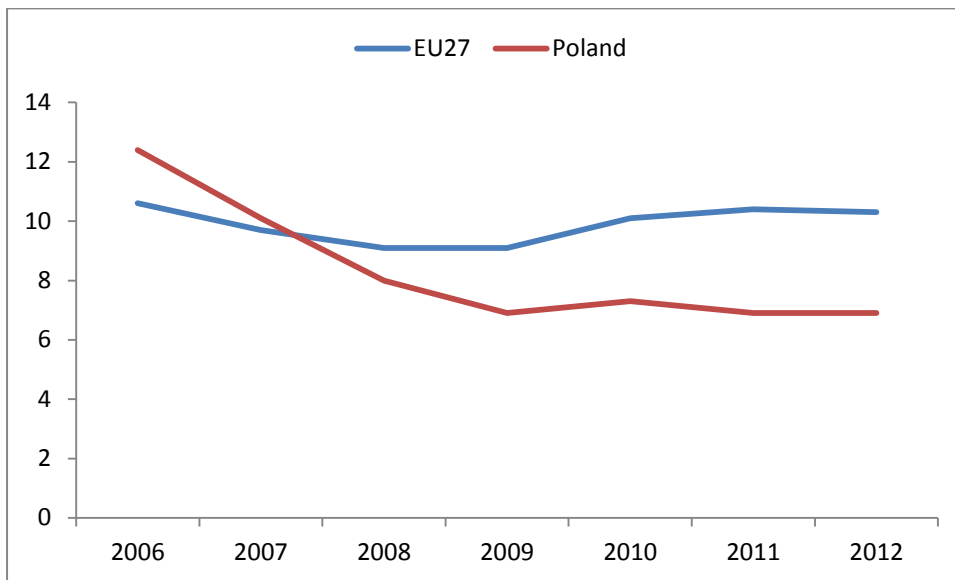
Source: Eurostat

Unlike the previous indicator, the two remaining show constant improvement. The percentage of people living in households with low work intensity dropped sharply in years 2006-2009, increased slightly in years 2009-2010 and dropped again – but more modestly –



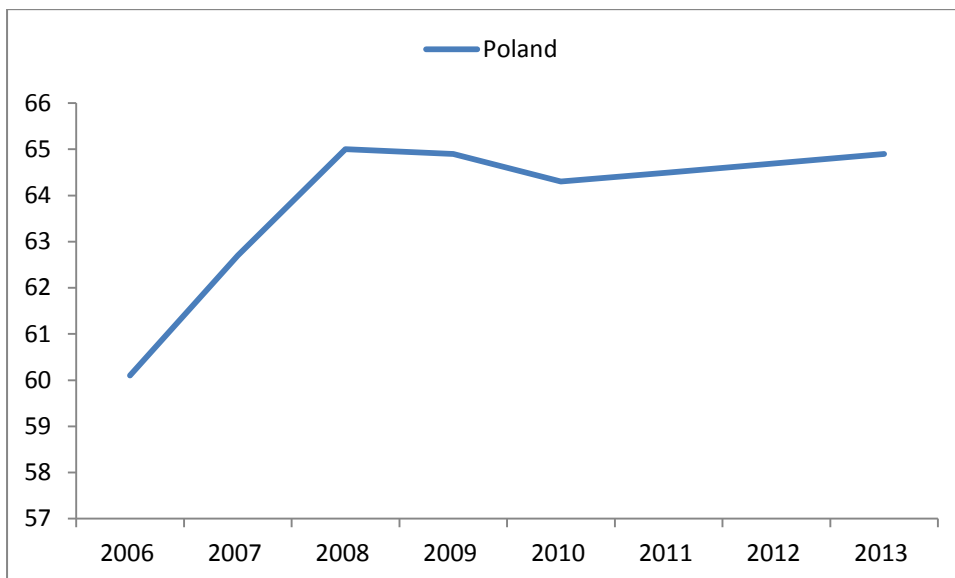
in years 2010-2012 (see figure 7). This indicator seems to be connected to the employment rate which has generally been increasing – with different growth rate – from 2008: it increased radically in years 2006-2008, then dropped slightly and increased again in years 2010-2013 – in 2013 it reached the level from 2009 (see figure 8).

**Figure 7: People living in households with very low work intensity, Poland and EU27**



Source: Eurostat.

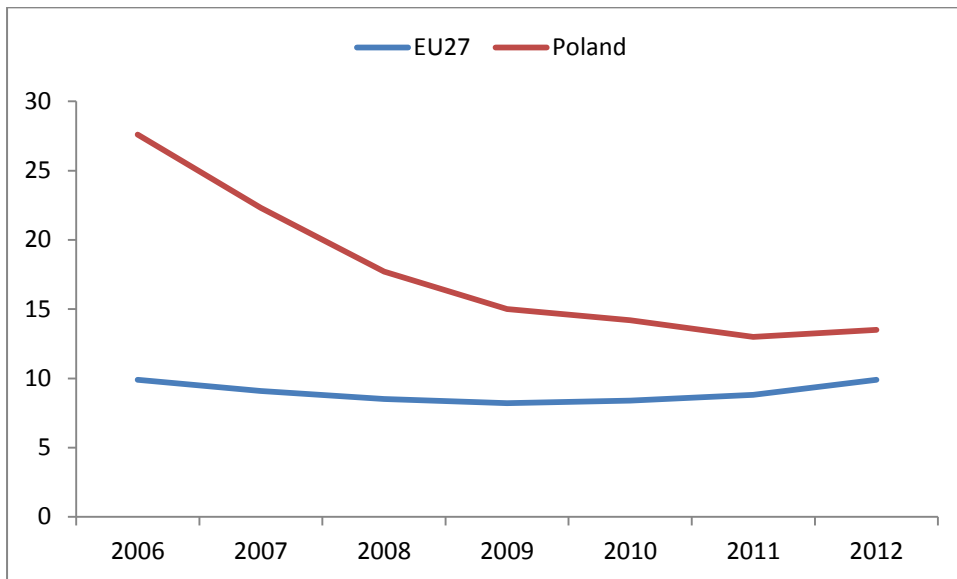
**Figure 8: Employment rate in Poland in years 2006-2013**



Source: Eurostat.

Finally, the percentage of severely materially deprived people dropped the most radically in comparison to other indicators: from 27.5% in 2006 (and 17.7% in reference year 2008) to 13% in 2012 and 13.5% in 2013 (see figure 9). It shows that poverty has been decreasing in absolute terms throughout all the analysed period.

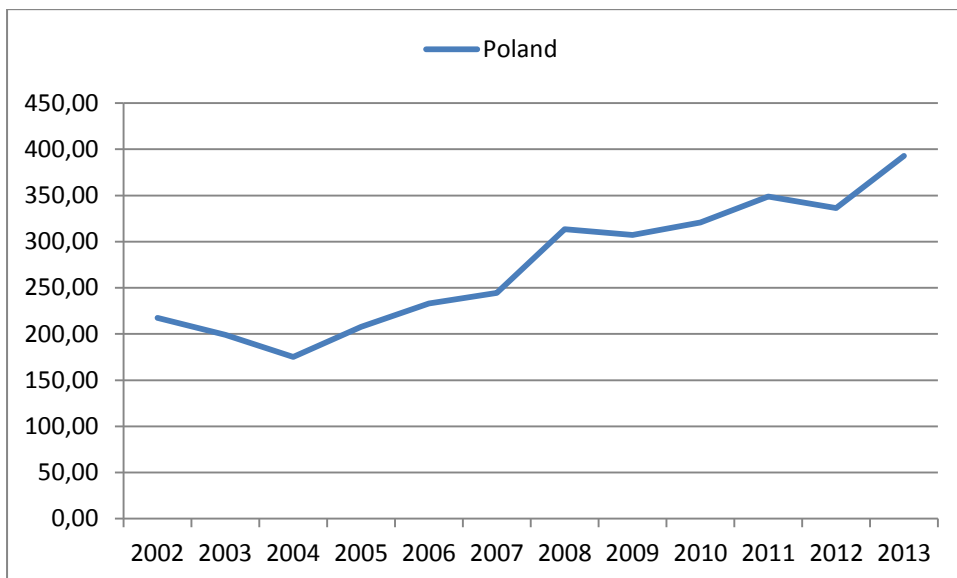
Figure 9: Severely materially deprived people, Poland and EU27



Source: Eurostat.

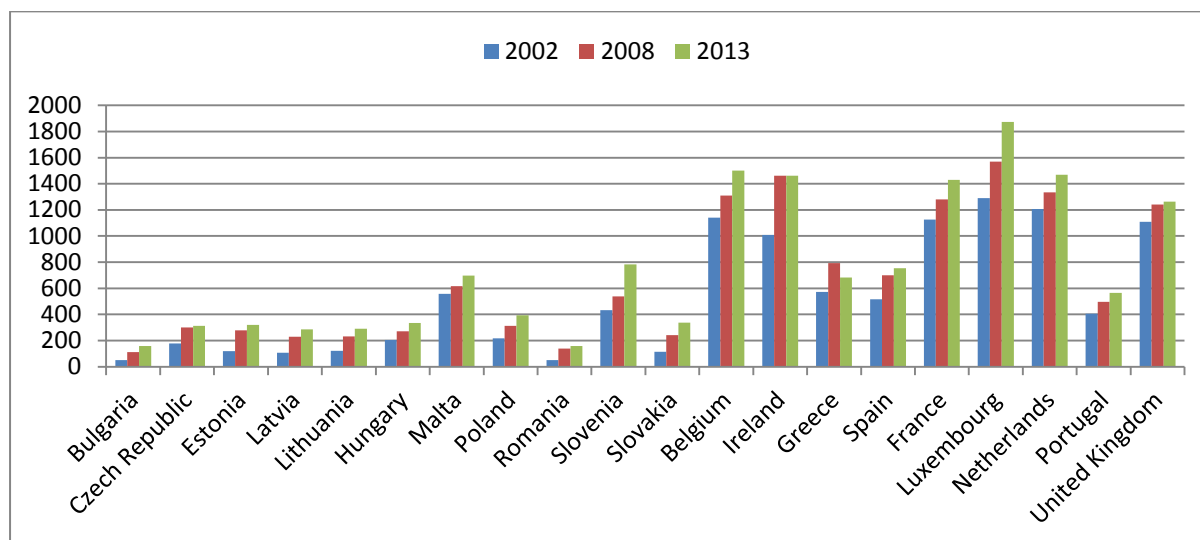
The minimum wage has been increasing visibly from 2004 (see figure 10). Although Poland has distinctly lower minimum wage than countries from the EU15, it is one of the highest among the new EU members – only Malta and Slovenia have higher minimum wage (see figure 11).

Figure 10: Minimum wage in Poland, years 2002-2013



Source: Eurostat.

Figure 11: Minimum wage in Europe in years 2002, 2008, 2013



Source: Eurostat.

Poland has not experienced negative growth of the GDP in the recent economic crisis, however the economy was affected by a downturn. The inflow of EU structural funds played an important role in tackling its effects. It is estimated that in 2004-2006 approximately 37% of employment growth might have been attributed to the impact of the EU Structural Funds (PAG Uniconsult, Pentor Research International, 2007). According to the Ministry of Regional Development the number of employed increased in 2010 by 315 thousand thanks to cohesion policy funding (Evidence-based conclusions, 2011). Yet, it is important to emphasise that the spill-overs of the crisis were reflected in unemployment and absolute poverty statistics in years 2009-2012 (see figure 1 and 2).

### 3. An iterative process: the European Semester and anti-poverty strategies

#### 3.1 Europe 2020's genetic moment

The anti-poverty target included in Europe 2020 strategy was not a salient political subject. None of the interviewed politicians remembered any discussions concerning it. The target itself was not discussed during the meetings of Parliamentary chambers. In fact, issues connected to Europe 2020 are rarely present during those meetings and often take a form of short Q&A sessions after information about developments in particular EU matters presented by ministers, deputy ministers or secretaries of state (primarily from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). A good example of it were the preparations for the Polish presidency in the Council of the European Union, when questions about the presence of Europe 2020 priorities were asked:

*Tadeusz Iwiński (Democratic Left Alliance): Will Poland draw any conclusions from the successful and unsuccessful presidencies in recent times? (...) And how do the priorities of Polish presidency match the general framework set by Europe 2000<sup>13</sup> strategy (...)?*

<sup>13</sup> The speaker meant Europe 2020 strategy.

**Mikołaj Dowgielewicz (Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs):** *Mr Iwiński asked about the EU 2020<sup>14</sup> strategy and Polish priorities. Priorities I've already mentioned - mainly new sources of growth in the EU resulting from the package concerning common market or proposal which will be discussed during Polish presidency concerning trans-European transportation and energy networks; and also problems which will be discussed by ministers of social affairs and employment, concerning economic activity – all those issues result from the EU 2020 strategy, so there is a synergy. [6<sup>th</sup> term of Parliament, meeting no 80 of the Lower Chamber of the Parliament, day 1 – 2010-12-14<sup>15</sup>].*

The only Parliamentary body where anti-poverty target emerged in discussions was the Commission for European Union Matters. The representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy presented the most important social priorities of Europe 2020 strategy to the MPs from the Commission. Presentation was focused on anti-poverty strategy and resources allocated to it in Poland rather than the target itself:

**Jarosław Duda (Secretary of State in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy):** *(...) I will add a few words about the quantitative targets I mentioned earlier. EU would like the number of people living in poverty to drop by 20 mln. I mentioned also the intention of reaching the 75% employment rate for persons aged 20-64. Those targets are well-articulated.*

*I will now reply to Mr Religa on the matter concerning our Polish reality. (...) I can prepare a detailed data for you with all the numbers. But I want to say that we 11.5 mld PLN is allocated for social protection in Poland. (...).*

*Mrs Prządka asked about guarantees [that the anti-poverty strategy will be more effective than the Lisbon strategy – author]. Financing we have is a guarantee and it depends on us how we use it. (...). I can prepare information concerning financial resources allocated in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to those goals and programmes that will be implemented. I will only remind you that we are constantly implementing and preparing new projects financed from ESF (...). [Meeting no 209, 2010-12-02<sup>16</sup>].*

Setting the national target and indicators was delegated to the officials from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and engaged mainly people representing the administrative – not the political – level. According to them, Poland generally supported setting the quantitative anti-poverty target, but they did not take part in negotiation it and made only some stipulations concerning the process:

*Those targets are political – it could have been as well 10 mln or 40 mln. EU council gathers and determines something. I don't know who set it, but I can imagine – knowing the practice – how it was set. Probably the Commission, before they issued this this communication about Europe 2020, there were*

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<sup>14</sup> The speaker meant Europe 2020 strategy.

<sup>15</sup> <http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/Debata6.nsf/main/4BBF0C0C#119>

<sup>16</sup> <http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/SQL.nsf/Main6?OpenForm&SUE>

*some talks – DGs fight with each other – and DG Employment did not want to be omitted (...) and this social part is often underestimated. (...) and they knew that there is a crisis coming (...) and that this situation should be used to realise this Lisbon goal, that is, modernisation of the European Social Model – at least I presume so. (...). And DG Employment wanted this number to be high – probably some percentage. And other DG were against it, because they doubted in the success of it. [Interview 3 - dyad with Polish administration officials].*

What was, however, important for the Polish side was to introduce indicators other than at-risk-of poverty indicator. A representative of MLSP directly involved in the process of negotiating the indicators depicts it as ideational conflict between the less and the more developed EU countries:

*We [the representatives of MLSP - author] had many doubts about this [indicator of relative poverty author]. Because according to this indicator the only country in the world without poverty in North Korea (...). So there is a problem with this indicator. When you flatten the incomes, everyone is poor – but relatively no one is poor. (...). There was a discussion at the ideational level, you know. Well, we live in market economy – some dispersion of incomes is a must (...). Emphasis on indicator which measures dispersion of incomes cannot be a good solution – especially in country such as Poland, because we are not Germany or France – they have a different starting point. In developing countries dispersion is natural. [Interview 2 - Polish administration official].*

Thus, Poland was a strong proponent of indicators supplementing at-risk-of poverty indicator. The main argument for it was that they offered additional information than those based on income distribution – the latter was considered as not giving a clear picture of the actual situation in particular countries. In fact, low intensity of work indicator and deprivation indicator are improving more rapidly in Poland, than at-risk-of poverty rate (see previous part).

It was assumed that as long as the country may count on considerable support from the EU funds poverty and social exclusion statistics should be dropping [Interview 2 - Polish administration official; Interview 3 - dyad with Polish administration officials]. Eventually, a target of 1 500 000 people less at-risk of poverty and exclusion was set – basing it on the prognoses of employment growth in relation to macroeconomic indicators (mainly GDP). Using another method was not possible because of the lacking data from previous years:

*I remember setting it – from this technical side: following those trends, looking for the right methodology. There are different methods (...) but there was not enough data. [Interview 3 - dyad with Polish administration officials].*

The key issue here seemed to be the timeframe in which this target was to be achieved. The improvement of poverty statistics was an immediate result of the EU accession, therefore it was important to make sure this would be acknowledged. Indeed, thanks to measuring changes from 2008 – before signs of crisis occurred – Poland has already fulfilled its obligation in more than 70% (see previous part). Although the dynamics of decrease in share of people at risk of poverty was the greatest in years 2005-2008, but the tendency still was

noticeable in years 2008-2011. In this period the number of people at risk of poverty dropped from 11 491 000 to 10 196 000 (NPR 2013-2014).

As stated in the interviews, political level was hardly engaged in selecting the national target:

*No, politicians were not involved in that process [of discussing the national target and indicators]. As for the target, I must say that there was no pressure from the political side – maybe just that we [officials from the Department of Economic Analyses and Prognoses in MLSP - author] set a realistic target, to avoid huge discrepancies at the end – such as fulfilment of goal in 20% - because it looks bad. Apart from that, no pressure. [Interview 2 - Polish administration official].*

The fact that political level was not involved was assessed positively by the interviewed administration official: no pressure was put on them during that process, except for the expectation that they set a realistic target. Its acceptance by the Council of Ministers was rather a technical matter:

*You know how the Council of Ministers works. There are no discussions. Documents are first prepared and negotiated with different resorts and then accepted during the meetings of permanent committee [of the Council of Ministers]. (...). There are economists in the Prime Minister's Office who are responsible for assessing the documents we send (from ministries) – to protect the Prime Minister from 'mines' – if we were proposing something that had no sense. [Interview 3 - dyad with Polish administration officials].*

There were, however, some discussions at the MLSP level regarding the target – there were concerns that it may prove too ambitious because of the spreading economic crisis<sup>17</sup>:

*I remember there was this discussion, whether this target is not too ambitious, because there is a crisis coming. It was ok in 2010, but we didn't know how the economic situation will evolve in 2011 and 2012. It luckily behaved well. [Interview 3 - dyad with Polish administration officials].*

Interlocutors recall also some pressure from the EC to make the target even more ambitious. They claim that the reason for it was the difficulty to reach the overall target of 20 mln from the national targets set by the member states – therefore EC wanted to pressure Poland for more, but with no result. Yet, some national experts emphasize that the target is indeed modest from several reasons. First of all, realising the target means reducing poverty by approx. 13% in comparison to approx. 17% indicated for the entire EU. Second of all, Poland has started from a higher poverty level than the EU average. Finally, poverty has already been reduced by 1.3 mln in the first four years and needs to be reduced by only 200 000 in the next years. Thus, some corrections of the target are postulated (see Topińska 2014).

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<sup>17</sup> In the document “Założenia do Krajowego Programu Reform na rzecz realizacji strategii Europa 2020” [Assumptions to the National Reform Programme for the realisation of Europe 2020 strategy] accepted by the European Committee of the Council of Ministers on November 22nd 2010 the national target for reducing poverty was set between 1.5 mln and 2 mln, thus there was still some scope for further decisions: <http://www.mg.gov.pl/files/upload/12466/Zalozenia%20do%20Krajowego%20Programu%20Reform.pdf>

## **3.2 The three Europe 2020 cycles: planning, reporting, recommending, negotiating**

### **3.2.1 The First Cycle: 2010-2011**

From the beginning the strategy of combating poverty and social exclusion described in National Reform Programme (NRP) was strongly associated with work. It was clearly stated in the document, that there was no other way of ensuring social inclusion than through the labour market, since social security system is not able to offer effective instruments to that end:

“Actions for reducing poverty and social exclusion will focus mostly on increasing the opportunities for employing the persons disadvantaged on the labour market (young persons, poorly educated, the disabled, immigrants). Unemployed and professionally inactive individuals and families are more susceptible to risk of poverty and social exclusion, which results from the belief that counteracting and combating poverty may be effective mostly through the labour market. States have no instruments e.g. in the area of social security which could effectively solve social exclusion problems in long-term perspective.” [National Reform Programme 2011: 44].

The approach presented in the NRP 2011 seems very much in line with this presented in the Annual Growth Survey 2011 (AGS) (European Commission 2011a). The AGS 2011 addressed exclusion only in terms of access to labour market (preventing long-term exclusion from the labour market and providing incentives for low income earners, young people and second earners to take up work and avoid exclusion are emphasised). Against that background, the strategy of combating poverty and social exclusion presented in NRP 2011 could be considered broader. Yet, as we will show in the next paragraphs, its structure is not entirely coherent, which makes it difficult to analyse.

It consisted of six main actions: 1) combating social exclusion, therein among young people aged 15-24; 2) social and vocational rehabilitation of the disabled; 3) social integration of immigrants; 4) development of social economy; 5) designing a new system of social services better adjusted to new challenges in the area of social exclusion; 6) construction of a coherent system of family and child support. Apart from that two other issues are diagnosed as crucial for the strategy, but are not reflected in actions: equalising access to information technology; enhancing cultural competences, providing incentives for active participation in society and strengthening sense of citizenship.

As shown in Table 4, not all areas were included in the list of tasks for 2011. Combating social and vocational exclusion of the disabled, construction of a coherent system of family and child support and preparation of a new system of social services were not referred to in terms of concrete tasks.

**Table 4: Tasks from NRP 2011.**

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsible body</b>
1	Combating poverty and social exclusion, therein among young people 15-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of a programme “Active forms of countering social exclusion”</li> <li>• Implementation of programmes and projects targeted to combating social exclusion of young people</li> <li>• Preparation of report “Employment in Poland” diagnosing the phenomenon of poverty and social exclusion</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of support system for socially susceptible energy recipients</li> </ul>	Ministry of Economy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of the National Urban Policy</li> </ul>	Ministry of Regional Development
2	Development of social economy in Poland	Implementation of projects supporting the development of social economy	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
3	Social inclusion of foreigners	Preparation of strategic document concerning Polish policy of foreigner’s integration	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
4	Social and vocational rehabilitation of the disabled	X	X
5	Designing a new system of social services better adjusted to new challenges in the area of social exclusion	X	X
6	Designing a coherent system of family and child support.	X	X

**Source:** NRP 2011.

The Assessment of the 2011 National Reform Programme and Convergence Programme for Poland (European Commission 2011b) does not comment on the abovementioned actions and tasks directly. However, it indicates four areas in which taking action is essential: support of families with children, especially as far as childcare is concerned to enable women reintegration with the labour market; prolongation of retirement age for women, to protect them from excessively low pensions; tackling the problem of in-work poverty; and combating social exclusion of the disabled, especially in the rural areas. Two of those are supported by country specific recommendations: increasing the retirement age and women’s participation in the labour market though better developed childcare.



The concentration of the first NRP on the economic matters – and marginalisation of the area of combating poverty and social exclusion – is confirmed also in the expertise prepared for the Polish EAPN concerning the implementation of anti-poverty policy in the framework of Europe 2020:

“Not much space was devoted to actions aiming at reduction of poverty/social exclusion in the NRP 2011. Not only was the target concerning this area placed at the end of the list of targets, but also few instruments serving its realisation were presented. Generally, all the emphasis was put on the improvement of the functioning of the labour market – and it was considered as the main opportunity to improve the situation in the area of poverty and social exclusion.” (Topińska 2014: 25).

The neglect of the anti-poverty dimension seems to be a more general trend observable at the EU level in the first Europe 2020 cycle, when it was “virtually non-existent” (Jessoula, Agostini, Sabato 2014: 17).

### **3.2.2 The Second Cycle 2011-2012**

The approach towards poverty and social exclusion in the actualisation of the NRP from 2012 was broadened (see Topińska 2014). The list of priority actions for the area was expanded in comparison to the previous document. Unlike the NRP 2011 tasks for 2012-2013 were directly linked to those actions (see Table 5).

The actualisation, although more internally coherent, does not refer to the previous actions – there is no information about the realisation of previous tasks or general progress in carrying out individual actions. One of the interviewed MLSP officials admits that actualisations (both) are not entirely transparent for the reader – which has been raised by the social partners:

*Well, maybe not unclear [about actualisations – author]... (...) social partners do not entirely ‘feel’ this European context and this NRP – what kind of process it is. They read only actualisations – and this is just bullet points, issues are formulated very briefly. It’s not clear what is meant by different sentences and what is to be carried out. But I have to defend the Ministry of Economy for this type of presentation, because the Commission wants it to be a short document. [Interview 1 – Polish administration official].*

The argument that the actualisations should be short and, thus, does not have to be clear seems not particularly convincing. What is more – reading all NRPs together increases the conviction about the general lack of coherence between planned and realised actions.

**Table 5: Actions and Tasks in 2012-2013 from NRP 2012.**

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Responsible body</b>
1	Affordable housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuing the social and communal housing programme and creating protected flats, night shelters and housing for the homeless</li> <li>Modification and continuation of the programme of social housing</li> <li>Sustainable management of the communal social housing resources</li> </ul>	Ministry of Transport, Construction and Maritime Economy
2	Developing social entrepreneurship of the people at risk of social exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of the “Active forms of countering social exclusion for 2011–2015” programme</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
3	Development of social economy sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing support infrastructure for the social economy entities in the systemic, institutional, legal, financial and educational dimension</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
4	Counteracting social exclusion, including youth at the age of 15–24 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of the “New perspectives” project Implementation of the “Youth Skill Academy 2”</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
5	Social and professional rehabilitation of disabled persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subsidising employment of the disabled persons</li> <li>Reimbursement of obligatory social security contributions of the disabled persons</li> <li>Improving the chances of the disabled for employment on the open labour market by providing support in enhancing their professional skills and acquiring professional experience in forms set out in regulations on professional rehabilitation</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
6	Social inclusion of the immigrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation of a strategic document on the Polish foreigner integration policy: “Polish Foreigner Integration Policy – Assumptions and Guidelines”</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
7	Development of social services system responding to the new challenges of social exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organising trainings for the employees of welfare and social integration institutions on implementing new standards of welfare and social integration services provided by social assistance organisational units e.g. for the elderly, disabled, crisis intervention, counteracting domestic violence, etc.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
8	Development of coherent policy for supporting families and child care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of three programmes in the field of family support and substitute parental care, and financing of adoption centres</li> <li>Implementation of the “Day Care Room – Children – Work” programme for supporting children and families at the local administrative level</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

Source: NRP 2012.

Some of the recommendations for the area of social exclusion from the Annual Growth Survey 2012 (European Commission 2011c) are reflected in the list of actions and tasks, namely access to affordable housing and active inclusion. The aspects of increasing effectiveness of social protection system and safeguarding its social automatic stabilisers are not addressed. In that cycle also electricity supply to vulnerable customers is not mentioned (unlike the previous one) despite the presence of this subject in AGS.

As far as CSR 2011 and The Assessment of the 2011 National Reform Programme and Convergence Programme for Poland are concerned, most of the recommendations were covered in the NSR 2012 – although many of them vaguely or partially. Social and professional rehabilitation of disabled persons is expressed by two tasks: subsidising of employment and reimbursing of social security. Childcare and reintegration of mothers with the labour market is addressed predominantly in the section concerning labour market through operational programme finance from EFS and governmental programme aimed at development of childcare institutions. Some developments were made also in the process of increasing the retirement age. However, the problem of in-work poverty was not accounted for in the NRP 2012.

The main concerns raised in the Assessment of the 2012 National Reform Programme and Convergence Programme for Poland (European Commission 2012a) were the low participation of women, elderly and young people in the labour market; in-work poverty; and low attainment in pre-school education. Some of the measures proposed in the NRP 2012 aimed at improvement of the situation in those areas were criticised as not ambitious enough: e.g. more places in pre-school education should be created and the policy in this area should be more consistent, more could have been done to reduce early retirement possibilities.

In the second cycle, Poland has for the first time received a direct recommendation in the area of poverty and social exclusion (previously it was mentioned only in the assessment of the NRP 2011 and NRP 2012):

- To combat labour market segmentation and in-work poverty, limit excessive use of civil law contracts and extend the probationary period to permanent contracts

Poland has objected the last part of the recommendation – prolongation of the probationary period – since it was not compatible with the Polish labour law: permanent contracts do not have probationary period, fixed term contracts play that role. EC sustained the recommendation despite that argumentation to the disappointment of the Polish side [Interview 6 - Polish administration official]. It was only changed in the next year's recommendation.

In 2012, the first and only National Social Report (NSR) was prepared. The document was pictured by the administration officials from the MLSP as supplementary to the NRP, i.e. only actions additional to those included in the latter were to be mentioned. In result, the subject of poverty and social exclusion is hardly addressed in the NSR: the quantitative target is recalled and the reference to NRP is given. Apart from that, pension reform and access to health care and geriatric care are discussed briefly (it has altogether 15 pages).

As one of the officials interprets it, the report is – on the one hand – a tool to empower Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) which has been marginalised by Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) in the Europe 2020 framework – on the other – a way to emphasise the importance of the social dimension in times of crisis. Yet, it could not mean the return to the “old” OMC:

*Europe 2020 limited social OMC and there was some feeling of dissatisfaction. First and foremost, the importance of EPSCO was reduced and those ministers noticed that all the crucial decisions have been made by ECOFIN and they are like square peg in a round hole. So adding an element of prestige was essential. Secondly, when there is a difficult economic situation it is advisable to strengthen the social side – at least in the documents. And Europe 2020 has in fact only one social target and there was a need for some supplement.(...) but there were voice in some member states that strengthening it too much would mean a return to the framework from the Lisbon strategy (...). Thus, a group was formed to find a consensus. It proposed the report to be a “light” document – member states would not have to submit it – only if they wanted to and had something new to say. [Interview 2 - Polish administration official].*

In result, the report had a low priority in Poland and was not widely consulted – only social partners were asked for their opinions, but not NGOs or academics. Social partners have strongly criticised the entire document. As we read in the statement made by “Solidarity”:

“The Presidium of National Commission of ‘Solidarity’ gives a negative opinion to the National Social Report presented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. We assess the document is unreliable (...)” (‘NSZZ Solidarność’ 2012)

The criticism concerned many aspects of government’s anti-poverty policy in general (not only contents of NSR), among other things: excessive optimism in forecasting the growth of employment rate, underestimation of unemployment rate in comparison to the data of the Central Statistical Office, disregard for the problem of in-work poverty, etc. The consultation of NSR was used by ‘Solidarity’ as an opportunity to express disappointment with government’s approach to social problems.

Whereas, the interviewed representatives of NGOs operating in the area of poverty and social exclusion were very astonished that – even though they asked MLSP about the document – they were completely ignored. They were also very critical about NSR:

*National Social Report – at least in the part we were interested in – was embarrassing... they just referred to the National Reform Programme. When something is not directly connected to the European Semester it’s obvious that the Ministry will not take it seriously. [Interview 16 – expert].*

It is clear that both social partners and NGOs expected the document to be similar to NAPs prepared in the framework of the SI OMC – where at least different actions implemented by administration in the area of poverty and social exclusion were enumerated. Thus, the version presented by the MLSP did not satisfy them at all.

### **3.2.3 Third cycle 2012-2013**

In the third cycle, visible changes occurred in reporting the anti-poverty strategy in the NRP. First of all, a short assessment of progress in realisation of quantitative target was presented. Second of all, summary of important tasks carried out in 2012 was included. Yet, most of them did not refer to the actions planned in the previous NRP. Apart from that, some of those actions disappeared from the new document (were replace by other) without any explanation: e.g. affordable housing, development of social entrepreneurship, social and professional rehabilitation of the disabled and social inclusion of migrants.

**Table 6: Actions and Tasks in 2013 - 2014 from NRP 2013-2014.**

	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Responsible body</b>
1	Adoption of the National Programme against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation of a draft version of the Programme – Q2 2013</li> <li>Interministerial and public consultations of the Programme –Q2 2013</li> <li>Expected date of adoption of the Programme by the Council of Ministers – Q22013</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
2	Support for the unemployed persons most isolated from the labour market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outsourcing activation services – a tool currently tested through a pilot project “Partnership for Work”. This is meant to be a part of wider legislative changes aimed at outsourcing the provision of services to jobseekers who the labour office is not able to help so as to make them employed;</li> <li>Activation and Integration Programme (AIP) implemented independently by a local PES or in cooperation with local SAO, depending on the financial resources of gminas.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
3	Support for families with children and children placed in foster care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministerial programmes for co-financing certain tasks of local government units related to support for the family and foster care system</li> <li>State budget financing of adoption centres and costs of foster care for foreigners’ children.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
4	Support for parents raising disabled children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governmental programme of support for persons entitled to care benefits: following its implementation, persons receiving care benefits will receive additional financial support</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
5	Introduction of standards of social assistance and social integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The following standards were developed: the standard of services for the elderly and the disabled, standard of crisis intervention, preventing domestic violence, standards of work for families with children, with the unemployed, standards of services for the homeless persons, and institution models. The standards will be tested throughout 2013.</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
6	Development of social economy sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drafting a National Programme for Social Economy Development</li> <li>Adopting an Act on a social enterprise, based on which it will be possible to obtain the status of a social enterprise</li> <li>Launching a pilot loan fund for social enterprises</li> <li>Launching a systemic project “System for strengthening the potential and competence of social cooperatives sector and establishing a cooperation network with labour market institutions as well as social assistance and integration institutions</li> <li>Financing activities connected to social economy from EFS (Human Capital Operational Programme)</li> <li>State financing for NGOs implementing projects in social economy</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
7	Counteracting social exclusion of the elderly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governmental Programme for Social Activity of the Elderly in 2012–2013: activation of the elderly, increasing their share in lifelong learning, participation in shaping the activities addressed to them at the local and national level, promoting cooperation between generations, as well as by developing social services for the elderly</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
8	Counteracting social exclusion of the young	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of programmes: “Voluntary Labour Corps as a provider of labour market services”, “New perspectives”, “New perspectives 2” and “Youth Skill Academy 2”</li> </ul>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
9	Support for families in financial difficulty by ensuring the social function of schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Scholarship Programme which involves providing financial support to children in the form of scholarship and school allowance payments and other. It may be granted to students in financial difficulty resulting from low income per person in the family, especially if there are additional problems in the family.</li> </ul>	Ministry of National Education

Source: NRP 2013.

The actions listed above were in line with the priority areas set in the AGS 2013 (European Commission 2012b). It emphasised development of active inclusion measures and strengthening of the linkage between social assistance and activation along with improving the take-up of measures by vulnerable groups:

- Measures for the unemployed persons most isolated from the labour market
- Standards of social assistance and social integration
- Development of social economy

However, no plans to introduce one-stop-shops in Poland were mentioned<sup>18</sup> – which was also recommended in AGS 2013.

It was not particularly difficult for the Polish side to indicate actions that supported combating the problem of in-work poverty raised in CSR 2012. The increase of statutory minimum wage was given as an example of complying with the recommendation: statutory minimum wage was increased from 1500 PLN (approx. 355 euro) to 1600 PLN (approx. 379 euro).

Increase of the minimum wage is a result of agreements reached during the tripartite negotiation. It is not directly influenced by EU policy. Trade unions which constantly strive for the increase of minimum wage often refer to the standards set by the International Labour Organisation, arguing that it should reach the level of 50% of the average wage. Although, an example of usage of the Europe 2020 framework to protest against blocking the increase of minimum wage by the government in 2010 may be indicated. As we read in the assessment of the NRP 2011 prepared by ‘Solidarity’ in the process of its consultation:

“In the part concerning social exclusion the authors of the Programme focus on the broadly understood issue of increasing employment opportunities. However, social exclusion is an increasing problem also among working people, the so called working poor who find it hard to satisfy basic needs from their earnings. One of the needed and realistic solutions would be to increase the minimum wage. The government has blocked this possibility by ignoring the agreement between employers and trade unions from 2010.” (NSZZ Solidarność 2011: 4).

It seems that trade unions use all possible opportunities to argue their case and consultations of NRPs are one of the few possible forums.

CSR did not trigger any actions additional to what has already been done in the area of counteracting in-work poverty at the domestic level. The aspect of labour market segmentation and excessive use of civil law contracts were not addressed at all.

Two issues concerning anti-poverty policy were raised in the Assessment of the 2013 National Reform Programme (European Commission 2013):

- Poland is among the countries with the lowest real household income per capita and with one of the lowest statutory minimum wages in the EU;
- Uncertainty of future pension adequacy in case of low-wage earners, people with short working careers, predominantly women: the increase of retirement age is a positively assessed but is happening too slowly; no other actions occurred.

The recommendation concerning counteracting in-work poverty and labour market segmentation has been reformulated in the CSR 2013: reducing the excessive use of civil law

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<sup>18</sup> A reform aiming at introducing one-stop-shops has not been discussed in Poland so far.

contracts was sustained, whereas prolongation of probationary period of permanent contracts was replaced by better transition from fixed-term to permanent employment.

To sum up, the three cycles of implementation of Europe 2020 discussed in this part show some developments in the area of anti-poverty policy, especially through investments in childcare aimed at enabling women to reintegrate with the labour market and through prolongation of retirement age for women, to protect them from poverty resulting from low pensions. Many of the recommendations are addressed next year, showing at least some actions connected to the indicated areas. However, it seems to be a very *ad hoc* process – different initiatives are identified by administration and matched with those areas, as in the case of minimum wage. Moreover, it is difficult to assess the anti-poverty strategy presented in NRP and its actualisations due to its incoherence – lack of continuity between actions and tasks and lack of monitoring of their realisation. Though, the transparency and scope of the parts concerning poverty and social inclusion have increased from cycle to cycle, which seems in line with the general developments at the EU level leading to strengthening of the anti-poverty dimension:

“Since 2012, growing ‘problem pressures’ and the evanescence of the European social dimension have prompted a reaction by the most ‘socially sensitive’ supranational actors with the aim to support the fight against poverty/social exclusion and to tackle social consequence of both the crises and the austerity measures themselves. Stakeholder mobilization was followed by some European politico-institutional actors acting in order to reinforce the Europe 2020 anti-poverty dimension by increasing the steering, as well as monitoring capacity of the EU institutions, reinforcing multilevel interaction.” (Jessoula, Agostini, Sabato 2014: 18).

It seems that the more marked presence of the anti-poverty dimension at the EU level after 2012, translated into more emphasis on it in Polish actualisations of the NRP. However, also pressure from domestic stakeholders such as trade unions and NGOs might have contributed to that (for details see also next part).

## **4. Europe 2020: actor participation and integrated actions to combat poverty**

### **4.1 Actor participation**

In the first cycle, NRP was prepared in a group consisting only of public administration officials. It changed in 2012, when a Team for Europe 2020 Strategy was established which included social partners, local administration organisations, academic organisations and non-governmental organisations (see Table 7). Administration presents it as governmental initiative. This opinion is not entirely confirmed by the representatives of Polish EAPN: as one of them recalls, organisation’s invitation to join the process of preparing NRP was preceded by numerous interventions at the Ministry of Economy (ME) responsible for managing the implementation of Europe 2020.

**Table 7: Teams for Lisbon strategy and Europe 2020**

Inter-ministerial Team for Lisbon Strategy	Team for Europe 2020 Strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of all ministries</li> <li>• Representatives of: Central Statistical Office; Office of Competition and Consumer Protection; Public Procurement Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of all ministries</li> <li>• Representatives of: Central Statistical Office; Office of Competition and Consumer Protection; Public Procurement Office; Polish Agency for Enterprise Development</li> <li>• Local administration organisations: Association of Polish Voivodships; Association of Polish Poviats; Union of Polish Metropolies; Union of Polish Cities; Association of Rural Gminas</li> <li>• Trade Unions: Independent Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarity"; All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions; Trade Unions Forum</li> <li>• Employers: Employers of Poland; Confederation of Polish Private Employers – Leviathan; Business Center Club</li> <li>• Academic organisations: Polish Academy of Science; Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences; Conference of Rectors of Higher Education Institutions</li> <li>• Sectoral organisations: Polish Chamber of Commerce; National Council of Agricultural Chambers;</li> <li>• NGOs: Institute for Sustainable Development; Working Community of Associations of Social Organisations (WRZOS); Polish Comity of EAPN; Polish Federation of Non-governmental Organisations; Foundation for Polish Science; Caritas Poland; Foundation Institute for Regional Development</li> </ul>

**Source:** Ministry of Economy working documents

The Team meets once per quarter, on average. It consists of 50-70 persons. At the beginning, the agenda and next steps are presented by the representative of the Ministry of Economy. Subsequently, selected subjects are presented by due ministries, discussed on the forum and preliminary arrangements between bodies (especially ministries) are made. Apart from that documents are exchanged between members of the Team: they are first consulted inside the administration and then sent to social partners.

Social partners expressed their dissatisfaction with how the process has been organised so far<sup>19</sup>, pointing out that time for sending remarks to the documents is often short and the process of their acceptance or rejection is not transparent [Interview 7 - social partner; Interview 8 - Civil Society Organisation]. One of them recalls being outraged when organisation was given four days for their remarks, all of them were rejected without any explanation, but the ME was convinced that consultation process was carried out:

*We are a quite strong organisation, we lob successfully [at the EU level] and we are well-known. So they wanted to write in their document that they consulted with us. We protested against it – what kind of consultations were those: they invited us two weeks before the*

<sup>19</sup> The interviews were conducted in February 2013.



*meeting, gave us four days for remarks and did not include any of them... but they ticked consultations off and they wanted to write it in the document, insolently... [Interview 8 - Civil Society Organisation]*

The Ministry is aware that the process of consultation has not been carried out well enough and declares that improvements will be made. However, its representative points out that the agenda of European semester is so tight, that it often limits time for consultation and it is very difficult to do anything about it [Interview 6 - Polish administration official].

#### **4.2 Policy integration**

There are three stages at which the preparation of the NRP and its actualisations is coordinated:

- preparing of each part of the NRP by due Ministries
- discussions during the meetings of the Team for Europe 2020 Strategy
- construction of the document by the Ministry of Economy

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) is responsible for preparing the anti-poverty and labour market strategies to the NRP. There is no working group in the ministry responsible for that. Instead, the process is coordinated directly by parties involved in elaborating particular parts – through informal interactions (e-mail, phone) or exchange of official documents [Interview 1 - Polish administration official]. Cooperation with other ministries in case of cross-sectoral issues is based on a similar rule – either informal contacts are used or formal letters are exchanged to coordinate matters.

Ministries responsible for writing individual strategies deliver them to the Ministry of Economy which is responsible for preparing an integrated and coherent document from those contents.

Meetings of the Team for Europe 2020 Strategy, where particular themes are discussed, progress in implementation of tasks is evaluated and next steps are agreed upon, play also a coordinating role. As one of the social partners notices, many inconsistencies are revealed in their course:

*At first the Ministry of Economy refers the developments at the Commission's level. Later on one of the parts [of the NRP] is presented, for example employment (...). And then there are questions (...) and different ministries and organisations see that something is happening, but also that someone assumed that the Ministry of Healthcare would do something and the Ministry of Health denies it. Inconsistencies come out during those meetings [Interview 8 - Civil Society Organisation].*

Thanks to the meetings some of the inconsistencies may be detected and corrected later on in direct communication between actors representing particular ministries or ministerial departments.

The anti-poverty strategy in the NRP takes into consideration various cross-sectoral matters connected to this field: employment policy, housing, access to energy, access to ICT. Yet, this seems not enough to call it an integrated strategy for several reasons. First of all, as shown in part 2, there are many inconsistencies in NRP and its actualisations: some planned

actions are changed without explanation and new occur out of the blue; information about realised actions in one cycle does not refer to the actions planned in the previous cycle. Second of all, the process of preparing the NRP reflects fragmentation of administrative processes: all strategies are planned by separate departments and coordinated formally and informally in terms of avoiding overlaps, but not fulfilling common goals.

## 5. Europe 2020 and the local dimension of anti-poverty policies

European Union is recognized at the local level<sup>20</sup> mainly through European funds. Three of them are mentioned as the most important: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (EFS) and European Food Aid Programme (PEAD) [Interview 9 - local Civil Society Organisation; Interview 10 - local Civil Society Organisation]. The first is directed to infrastructure with the aim to improve Radom's competitiveness. The second is directed to ALMP measures as well as combating social exclusion. The last covers basic nutritive needs of people in difficult financial situations.

EU funds are very noticeable at the local level, especially in those moments when they become scarce: suddenly money people started to be accustomed to stop coming [Interview 11- representative of local authorities]. The inflow of funds seems to be a major factor strengthening NGOs, which are quite numerous in Radom: they carry out various projects in the framework of ESF and PEAD [Interview 9 - local Civil Society Organisation; Interview 10 - local Civil Society Organisation]. The creation of the Centre of Non-governmental Organisations by Radom authorities, which aims at supporting NGOs by advisory, training, technical assistance, sharing office space, was an indirect procedural effect of the availability of EU funds. The local authorities established it to help NGOs develop and support them in applying for EU funds:

*It was an incubator for non-governmental organization. It gathered around citizens, active groups – they received technical and more substantive support. Today those organisations work together, they obtain financing – we still teach them how to find those funds.* [Interview 11 - representative of local authorities].

Europe 2020 itself is not recognized at the local level – none of the respondents knew about the document. There are also no references to it – or the National Reform Programme – neither in the Strategy for Solving Social Problems in years 2011-2015 nor in Development Strategy for Radom in years 2008-2020. Also the local debates on social policy are not influenced by the EU level in any other way than through the discussion of EU funding. Although, the language of social exclusion – in case of Poland associated with the EU accession – is present in some of the strategies, which may indicate a mild discursive effect of “Europe” at the local level. Yet, it is difficult to say to what extent it translates into the perception of social problems of the main actors, since this notion is hardly used by the interviewees – they refer to very specific social problems or poverty. Apart from that, the usefulness of strategies is criticized by informants:

*There are more and more strategies – combating unemployment, supporting families, etc. Public servants are occupied mostly with writing strategies. You need money to implement it – and that's were the subject ends. (...). This is*

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<sup>20</sup> Analysis on the basis of the case study of Radom (LAU 1).

*writing documents for documents sake.* [Interview 11 - representative of local authorities].

The obligation to prepare strategies at the local level is directly associated to the EU accession. The requirement to prepare strategies connected to social problems and social policy at every level of local administration was introduced in 2004, with the new Act on social assistance. The aim of this legal provision was to prepare both – social assistance organisations and local authorities to operating in post-accession reality, where obtaining funding would be connected to the capability to plan future actions. Thus, even though many of the strategies do not play any other role than the reference point in application for funds, their propagation may be considered as a widespread procedural effect of the EU accession.

## **6. Europe 2020 and the fight against poverty: towards a multilevel, multi-stakeholder and integrated arena?**

This part is focused directly on the three hypotheses presented in the introduction. We will quote them again in order to make following the analysis easier:

1. *First, we may expect that, compared to the OMC-Lisbon phase, the Europe 2020 strategy is more likely to produce effects in the political sphere. Accordingly, we assume that the issue of (the fight against) poverty may have become more salient at the domestic level and/or European target/indicators have been more openly discussed - and then accepted or rejected by the various national actors. Although we expect a limited direct influence on policy changes at the national level, in some cases agenda shifts and revision of national legislation may also have resulted from national-supranational interactions within the Europe 2020 framework (NRPs, CSRs).*
2. *(a) Second, at least in theory, we might expect increased cross-sector and cross-departmental coordination – i.e. more integration – in line with the new overarching framework for policy coordination.(b) By contrast, the switch from the Social OMC to Europe 2020 and its implementation should have represented a step back with respect to both multi-level and multi-stakeholder involvement in governance processes.*
3. *Third, we may also expect that, from the first to the third annual cycle, the Europe 2020 arena has become more participatory – with regard to involvement of both stakeholders and levels of government – as well as more integrated mostly due to increased problem pressure in most MS, the above mentioned effects in the political sphere (i.e. our first hypothesis) and supranational actions aimed at reinforce governance mechanisms (Jessoula, Sabato 2013: 5-6).*

As we will show, the Polish case – despite its specificity – confirms to some extent most of the assumptions. Yet, one factor weakening the effects of anti-poverty dimension of Europe 2020 at the domestic level may be indicated: limited problem pressure resulting from the relatively mild influence of the economic crisis on the domestic socio-economic situation.

### 6.1 Procedural effects

Similarly to the initial assumptions (hypothesis 2a), procedural effects of Europe 2020's anti-poverty strategy are visible in the area of policy integration. The inclusion of fight against poverty and social exclusion among subjects coordinated in the framework of NRP is a clear modification in comparison to the Lisbon agenda. Formerly, matters connected to poverty and social exclusion were not part of this process, i.e. they were not discussed during the meetings of the Team for Lisbon Strategy. However, it does not mean that there was no inter-ministerial coordination of the anti-poverty dimension in the SI OMC framework. As mentioned in part 2.2, all NAPs had to undergo inter-ministerial consultations, which aimed at making them compatible with other policy areas (strategy documents, legal acts, etc.). What changed is the formal inclusion of the area in the NRP's coordination process.

Also participation was formally strengthened in the Europe 2020's framework – although not from the very beginning. As mentioned in part 4.1, the Team for Europe 2020 Strategy which included social partners, local administration organisations, academic organisations and non-governmental organisations, was established only in 2012. It was an improvement in comparison to the period of implementation of the Lisbon strategy, when similar Team existed, but consisted exclusively of central administrative bodies (see Table 7).

Inclusion of new actors in the process of consultation of NRP's actualisation may be considered a procedural change related to the Europe 2020 strategy. According to the interviews, the decision to expand the Team was based on the experiences with the implementation of the Lisbon strategy:

*The Team for the Lisbon strategy was established in 2005, in different times. I'm not saying that there was no need to include social partners ... but it was only on the basis of the Lisbon experiences that we realized that we need this social side. [Interview 6 - Polish administration official].*

Procedural change was not only related to inclusion of the “social side”, i.e. social partners, academics, non-governmental organizations. It also meant inclusion of the representation of local administration, i.e. increased vertical coordination of government levels. However, as the case of Radom shows, it not necessarily translates into increased knowledge about Europe 2020 strategy or NRP at the local level. This may be connected to the fact that only representation of local administration interests participates in NRP's consultations, i.e. bodies such as Association of Polish Poviats or Union of Polish Cities (see Table 7). Thus, access to information depends on participation of local authorities in those networks.

It is important to note that if we compare consultations of the anti-poverty aspect of Europe 2020 with inclusion of different actors in the SI OMC, the change will not be as significant as it may seem – especially in case of multi-stakeholder participation. National Action Plans prepared in the framework of the SI OMC engaged different actors in the consultation process. Unlike Europe 2020 social partners, non-governmental organizations as well as

academic and research institutions were not part of any official team, but they were always invited to consultation meetings (Weishaupt 2014; Zieleńska 2013).

Situation was less transparent with local administration in the SI OMC framework. Local administration representatives were not always invited to consult NAPs. They were included in case of the first and the last NAP. The first NAP was consulted with the already mentioned National Social Inclusion Strategy by the representatives of local governments participating in the Task Group for NSIS – those were organisations similar to those taking part in the Team for Europe 2020. The last was consulted directly with regional and local bodies (regional centres of social policy and municipal social assistance offices). However, it was only after the intervention of one of the experts that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy officials decided to include local administration in consultations (Zieleńska 2013).

To sum up, the hypothesis (3) regarding changes in multi-stakeholder and multi-level participation in Europe 2020 framework were confirmed only partially in the Polish case. Indeed, participation was enhanced from the first to the next cycles. But the reason for it was hardly the increasing problem pressure (the poverty indicators have constantly been dropping). It was rather a combination of supranational and domestic factors. On the one hand, supranational stakeholders and politico-institutional actors were pressuring for improved governance architecture in the social area (see Jessoula, Agostini, Sabato 2014). This process empowered also domestic stakeholders, who put pressure on the Ministry of Economy to include them in the Team for Europe 2020 (see part 4.1). On the other hand, some lessons from the Lisbon era were learned also by the governmental actors, who claimed they saw by themselves the need to improve participation.

Finally, as far as the comparison of the multi-level and multi-stakeholder involvement in governance processes in the Social OMC and Europe 2020's framework is concerned – the answer is not unequivocal (hypothesis 2b). On the one hand, in the latter case participation of those actors was institutionalised through their inclusion in the Team for Europe 2020 strategy and, thus, less exposed to random decisions of ministerial officials (which seems especially important as far as the involvement of the representation of local levels is concerned). On the other hand, in some Social OMC periods the participation of stakeholders was wider than in the case of Europe 2020 (see part 2.2). Moreover, some of the interviewed non-governmental stakeholders declared, they had a sense of more influence on SI OMC documents (NAPs) than on the NRPs [ Interview 4 – Civil Society Organisation].

## **6.2 Substantive effects**

The most important substantive effect of Europe 2020 is bringing combating poverty and social exclusion into the government's political agenda. NRP is one of the main strategic documents of the government and issues included in it are subject to regular monitoring. During the meetings of the Team for Europe 2020 current progress in realisation of actions and tasks is presented and discussed by its members – including high rank administrative officials, i.e. state secretaries who represent the political level of administration. This indicates an increased salience of anti-poverty policy in comparison to NAPs prepared in the framework of SI OMC, which were not subject to regular monitoring and political level was hardly interested in their implementation.

NRP was prepared along with government's initiative to set in order all the existing strategic documents, which came out to be numerous and unaccounted for. It was the starting point for

drafting new overarching national strategies – the mid-term National Development Strategy 2020 and the long-term National Development Strategy Poland 2030. The place of NRP was thoroughly discussed by Team of Strategic Advisers to the government, responsible for the mentioned process. In result, NRPs' goals became integrated with the two mentioned strategies.

According to the interviews, NRPs were also used to signal Polish priorities to the EC – emphasizing the role of cohesion policy:

*Europe 2020 – at least in the initial phase – underrated the cohesion policy as an instrument to realize targets. We in Poland – it is a well-known fact – count on European funds, new financial perspective. And the government – and the team of advisers – were convinced that it should be clearly exemplified.* [Interview 1 - Polish administration official].

It is confirmed in the NRP 2011, where a clear reference to cohesion policy and financial perspective 2014-2020 is included to emphasise the role of EU funding in the process of implementation of Europe 2020:

“The Polish National Reform Programme has been designed so as to use to a maximum extent the funds allocated under the cohesion policy and Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. These are an important source of financing for numerous projects which allow catching-up and building new competitive advantages, and contribute to greater cohesion within the European Union. This will also enable proper preparation of Poland for the continuation of an effective uptake of EU funds under the 2014 – 2020 financial perspective.” (p. 5).

Thus, the process of implementation of Europe 2020 is not one-way: elements of Europe 2020 influenced domestic policy, but it was also used at the domestic level as a tool to put pressure on the EU regarding the future financial perspective.

The effects of Europe 2020 can be traced to a new Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2020 (SDHC). SDHC is one of the 9 development strategies of the government, created as a part of the mentioned process of setting in order the strategic documents. It was accepted by Council of Ministers in June 2013. It is directly stated that the strategy “supports the realisation of targets which have been included in European Union’s strategic document – Europe 2020” (ibid. p. 5). Improvement of the situation of people/groups at risk of poverty is among 5 main goals of the strategy and the indicators set in Europe 2020 to measure the achievement of anti-poverty target are included as key measures (see also Topińska 2014: 27).

Apart from the above, the inclusion of quantitative anti-poverty target seems crucial from the perspective of implementation of anti-poverty policy. It changes the long lasting routine connected to preparation and implementation of documents concerning poverty and social exclusion (especially last two NAPs). Those documents were almost always based on actions already taken by Polish administration – which matched chosen priorities – and never set any independent goals. As one of the experts representing one of the important European NGOs put it:

*“Europe 2020 strategy – the introduction of this quantitative target which is monitored by the EC is an important upgrade. General strategy is similar to*

*this from the past – we are including things we are already doing, but there is this target that should be fulfilled”.* [ Interview 16 – expert].

In other words, actualisations of NRP are based on enumeration of various initiatives from the area of combating poverty and social exclusion which are rarely planned in direct relation to the document. The process has the opposite direction – every year the administration is reviewing implemented actions and finds suitable initiatives to match the goal of combating poverty and social exclusion (hence the mentioned changes of actions and tasks in actualisations – see section 3). Yet, thanks to the existence of the quantitative target, the progress towards decreasing poverty and exclusion has to be reported regularly, independently of the actions and tasks.

What should be noted, is that the actual political importance of the anti-poverty strategy resulting from Europe 2020 has not been tested so far. Poland has not experienced a very increased problem pressure caused by the economic crisis. The anti-poverty target has been nearly achieved – and the percentage of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion is constantly dropping, although slowly. As one of the interlocutors put it:

**Respondent 1:** *You asked about the target.*

**Interviewer:** *Yes, whether it changes anything?*

**Respondent 1:** *I doubt it, because we are realizing it – everything looks well. (...).*

**Interviewer:** *And if we had problems with reaching it?*

**Respondent 1:** *Maybe it would have had more significance.* [Interview 3 - dyad with Polish administration officials].

This makes it hard to verify the hypothesis (1) concerning the increased political salience of the subject, since it does not trigger controversies - which are more likely to be a basis of political debate in Poland.

Finally, Europe 2020 had also an important indirect effect connected to European Social Fund. It may be assumed that the direct emphasis on the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the strategy strengthened importance of this area in the framework of ESF. It is visible at least in Poland. So far programmes financed from ESF have been very employment-oriented. In the new financing perspective one of the ex-ante conditionalities to the target concerning support of social inclusion and fight against poverty is the existence of national strategic framework regarding the policy against poverty (conditionality 9.1). Whether the already mentioned Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2020 fulfils this requirement was discussed between MLSP representatives and experts [Interview 16 – expert]. Eventually, it was decided that a new document should be prepared. In result, Poland had to draft rapidly the National Programme against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020 directed to combating poverty/social exclusion. Its preparation was announced in the 2013/2014 NRP’s actualisation. As we read on the MLSP website:

“(…) In the context of new government’s programming methodology, extracting the area of poverty and social exclusion is the part of national actions aimed at building the European Social Model. The Programme [against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020 – author] was announced in the National Reform Programme for realisation of Europe 2020 strategy – actualisation 2013/2014 accepted by the Council of Ministers on April 30<sup>th</sup> 2013. (...)”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://empatia.mpips.gov.pl/-/krajowy-program-przeciwdzialania-wykluczeniu-spolecznemu-2020>

The Programme is currently being consulted with social and third sector partners. It sets six priorities: combating social exclusion of children and adolescents; coherence of social, educational and health care initiatives for children and adolescents; active inclusion in local communities; safety and activity of elderly people; combating housing uncertainty and homelessness; management and structural changes in social integration system.

## 7. Conclusions

Polish accession to the EU was connected to the rescaling of social policy: the new emphasis on ALMP, the introduction of the enforceable right to minimum income in particular cases and the new obligation of drafting different strategic documents. The Social Inclusion OMC process was partly a source of those changes.

As shown in the report, the first SI OMC cycle – especially the years 2002-2004 – was used to set new priorities in the anti-poverty policy. The aim was to use the modernisation chance given by the accession to safeguard not only economic development, but also social cohesion – create opportunity for larger parts of the population to benefit from economic changes.

In spite of the declining political importance of the SI OMC process in later periods, it brought about some procedural and substantive effects. The former were connected to the consultations of NAPs. First of all, social and third sector partners became engaged in the process of their drafting. Second of all, the process of coordination between ministries and inside the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was strengthened thanks to SI OMC. However, in the first case, it meant exchange of detailed data and information. Whereas, in the second, it generated many difficulties with working across the departmental divide. As for the substantive effects, they had origins in years 2002-2004. Fund for Social Initiatives to support financially NGOs was created in result of agreements from that time. Apart from that, the language of social inclusion, introduced to policy planning in that period, took roots – at least as far as drafting strategic documents is concerned.

Europe 2020 brought some changes to domestic anti-poverty policy. Although, it has hardly influenced the domestic political debate, it generated various procedural and substantive effects, which to some extent confirm the hypotheses presented in guideline for the report.

As for the procedural effects, a Team for Europe 2020 Strategy was established in 2012 (during the second cycle of Europe 2020 implementation), consisting of government administration, social partners, local administration organisations, academic organisations and non-governmental organisations. A similar Team existed during the Lisbon period, but consisted only of central administrative bodies. Apart from that, poverty and social exclusion was not among policy areas the Team for Lisbon strategy coordinated. In result:

- a) The integration of anti-poverty policy with other policy areas improved in the Europe 2020 framework, as it was formally included in planning and monitoring of NRPs (hypothesis 2a).
- b) The participation of stakeholders and local administration improved from the first to the third cycle (hypothesis 3).

The comparison of participation of stakeholders and local administration in Europe 2020's framework and Social Inclusion OMC framework creates more difficulties. On the one hand,



in some periods of the SI OMC the participation of those actors was wider. What is more, some of them declared they had more sense of influence on preparation of NAPs than on preparation of NRP's actualisations. On the other, in the new framework the participation has been institutionalised – i.e. became less prone to *ad hoc* decisions of ministerial officials (hypothesis 2b).

The most important substantive effect is bringing anti-poverty policy into government's political agenda – it became subject to regular monitoring. It seems to be connected especially to the introduction of quantitative target into the NRP. The practice that emerged in the last two cycles of SI OMC – which came down to setting broad priorities and matching them with actions already carried out by the ministries, without much consideration of the coherency of documents as well as the realisation of priorities – has so far been applied also in case of drafting NRP and its actualisations. It is visible in two aspects. First of all, actions and tasks change in every cycle and no attention is given to secure coherency between them or explain why some are crossed out from the documents and other introduced to them. It suggests that the process is *ad hoc* – officials responsible for NRP include actions and tasks which are currently carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Second of all, answers to CSR are based on matching the already implemented actions – resulting from domestic processes – with particular recommendation. As in the case of minimum income increase, which was planned independently of European level in result of social dialogue. Presenting it as an answer to recommendation on in-work poverty gives an impression of compliance with CSR, but in fact is not directly connected to the EU level.

Introduction of the quantitative target brought an important change especially to the monitoring of anti-poverty policy. Implementation of Europe 2020 requires measuring actual progress towards achievement of the set target – which is new in this policy field. It has to be done in spite of the changes in actions and tasks included in the NRP.

However, the limited problem pressure Poland faces in the area of poverty due to relatively modest impact of the economic crisis on the socio-economic situation in the country – and the fact it has nearly reach the national anti-poverty target – makes full assessment of the political importance of Europe 2020's anti-poverty dimension difficult. In other words, realisation of the target does not require special political (government) efforts. Yet, there are no attempts to verify the target and make it more ambitious. Thus, we may conclude that hypothesis 1 – concerning the increased political salience of anti-poverty policy in Europe 2020's framework in comparison to the Lisbon framework, has been confirmed only partially.

Apart from that, an indirect effect of the anti-poverty dimension of Europe 2020 occurred in Poland. The new conditionality for ESF, which required drafting a strategy of combating poverty and social exclusion resulted in creation of new strategic document – National Programme against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020.

Finally, the analysis of Europe 2020 cycles has shown that it should be analysed as a two-way process – not only should the influence of processes from the European level at the domestic level be studied, but also the usage of Europe 2020 as a tool for safeguarding domestic interests, as it has been done in Poland with including references to the role of cohesion policy in securing the realisation of NRP targets.

## **Section B: The peer review meeting – Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people**

### **1. Introduction**

The peer review “Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people” discussed here took place 29-30 October 2009 in Oslo, Norway. It was hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion joined by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. The ‘peer’ countries were: Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and United Kingdom (represented by administration officials and national experts). The Polish side was represented by two experts from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy – one from the Department of Social Assistance and Social Inclusion and one from the Department of Labour Market. Other participants of the peer review were:

- The thematic expert (a researcher from the ASTRI Research and Consultancy Group)
- A representative of the Directorate-General, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission
- A representative of European stakeholders: European Anti-Poverty Network;
- Representatives of other organisations: The Work Research Institute, Representatives from the Norwegian branch of the European Anti-poverty Network (Welfare Alliance);

The study of the selected peer review is based on the analysis of the following documents:

- Minutes
- Discussion paper prepared by the thematic expert
- Synthesis report prepared by the thematic expert
- Host country report
- Comment papers prepared by the representatives of the guest countries
- Short report from the peer review
- Norwegian Peer Review on Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people, Norway, 29-30 October 2009. Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme (by Public Policy and Management Institute).
- Short report about the peer review prepared by Polish participants for their superiors in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
- Host country assessment: synthesis report. Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme (by OSE&Public Policy and Management Institute).

Apart from that, three expert interviews with the employees of the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy were used as a source of information about the peer review<sup>22</sup>: one interview was conducted in May 2010 and the other two in February 2013.

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<sup>22</sup> One of the interviews was conducted for my PhD thesis.

**Table 8: Peer review details**

Host country:	Norway
Peer country:	Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom
Stakeholder:	EAPN
Thematic expert:	Rienk Prins, Astri Research and Consultancy Group
Number of participants:	31
Length of a meeting	1.5 days
Site visit	2 local NAV-offices in Oslo (NAV Grorud and NAV Østensjø*)

**Note:** \*Labour and Welfare Administration

**Source:** Budginaitė 2012: 6

## **2. The peer review “in context”: links with European and domestic agendas**

### **2.1 Description of the policy under review**

The peer review meeting concerned Norway’s Qualification Programme (QuP), which has been implemented since 2007 as a result of a reform aiming at: merging employment and insurance administration into Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV); strengthening partnership between central and local administration and integrating services for the unemployed. In 2009, when the peer review was organised, the reform was still ongoing and the QuP was in the initial phase (it has become nationwide only from 2010). The impact of the NAV reform as well as the QuP have been undergoing a regular evaluation which was oriented towards introducing essential improvements on current basis (Prins 2009a; Budginaitė 2012).

The introduction of the mentioned reform was preceded by series of pilot programmes aimed at labour market integration of vulnerable groups as well as a White paper “Welfare, Work and Inclusion” which put forward new policy measures in the field of labour market and welfare policy – including the QuP (Schaft 2009: 3-5).

QuP is addressed to people between 19 and 67 who:

- have considerably reduced earning ability and no or limited national insurance rights;
- who are at risk of falling into/are in a passive situation characterised by income poverty;
- who have a chance of getting a job through individual follow-up, even if it takes time (Schaft 2009: 6).

The first step is to fill in a “work-ability assessment” and attend an interview on the basis of which individual’s suitability to the programme is determined and an “activation plan” is prepared. People who have special needs receive an “individual plan”. Next, most of the participants have to complete a basic skills training: social and coping skills, basic work experience. Later on participants join targeted groups oriented towards their better

employability, and are referred to a work-experience placement organised by local employers (Minutes 2009; Short report 2009).

**BOX 1: programme details**

In 2009 participants were supposed to spent 37.5 hours per week in the programme for a whole year. Participants received monthly payment which equalled 145,762 NOK (EUR 17,362) per year and was at the level of minimum wage. The programme could be prolonged to the second year.

QuP puts emphasis on social and health services to secure well-being of its participants. Thus, employment measures may be supplemented with medical/psychological treatment, rehabilitation and specialised training etc. Apart from that programme is personalised – every participant is appointed an individual case worker (‘consultant’).

**Table 9: Example of weekly activities in QuP – man, 20 years, with problems related to substance abuse**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Work experience placement in ordinary work place (8h)	Work experience placement in ordinary work place (8h)	Work experience placement in ordinary work place (8h)	Time at free disposal	Consultation with NAV advisor (1h)
			Consultation with drug counsellor (1h)	Time for setting private issues
NAV is responsible for carrying out the plan and following up the participant. In the weekend he performs physical training exercises. The plan also involves training to acquire more regular day rhythm.				

Source: Schaft 2009: 7.

**2.2 Relevance of the topic at the EU level**

The idea behind Qualification Programme was very much in line with the developments in EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process. QuP was based on coordination of different levels of government and different stakeholders and aimed at inclusion of vulnerable groups – what exemplified the goals set by the EU (Prins 2009b).

The direct reference point for the peer review at the EU level was the Commission Recommendation on active inclusion from October 2008 – subsequently endorsed by the European Council and European Parliament. It proposed integrated approach towards instruments designed to support people who were distanced from the labour market, based on three pillars: sufficient income support; inclusive labour markets; access to quality services.

The Recommendation was followed by a report prepared by EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion concerning Minimum Income Protection in the EU member states indicating that, even though many of them expanded ALMP, a lot was still to be done in the area of MIP. The main conclusion of the report concerned the insufficient level of MIP payments in many of the member states. It was connected to the is a general tendency to make transfers conditional and avoid providing disincentives for work, i.e. too high payments which could prevent people from taking up employment. In result, many of the member states offered financial benefits that were not sufficient to lift people from poverty and secure their integration with the labour market (Frazer, Marlier 2009).

The QuP was treated as a good practice of integrating three pillars of active inclusions. The following aspects were mentioned as especially valuable from that perspective by the thematic expert (Prins 2009b: 15):

- Creation of NAV – a single agency responsible for comprehensive work with programme’s participants: providing income support, employment and social services (one-stop-shop).
- Focus on various vulnerable groups which were offered multidimensional support.
- A more client-centred and demand driven approach (instead of supply-oriented approach): tailoring services and taking into account individual’s perspective.
- Adequate income support.

### 2.3 The domestic context

Poland has been struggling with integration of employment and social assistance services (not to mention other policy areas such as health care or housing) ever since a new legal framework based on more active approach to social policy was introduced in 2004 and 2005. Shortly before the peer review new rule was established, aimed at increasing cooperation and information exchange between local Public Employment Services (PES) and local Social Assistance Centres (SAC) (see Box 2). It was, however, far from implementing integrated services such as proposed by QuP. The latter was confirmed in the “Polish experience of active inclusion tools targeted to the most vulnerable groups – Comments on Norwegian good practice of the National Qualification Programme”:

*As compared to Norway, Polish organisation of social services, as well as overall economic context is different. The legal framework of Polish active inclusion policy allows application of a wide range of instruments of active inclusion for those at risk of social exclusion and in a particularly difficult labour market situation. (...). The primary obstacle preventing the most effective application of active inclusion instruments consists in frequently observed lack of coordination of actions on the part of employment services and social assistance services in practice, e.g. lack of comprehensive approach, lack of “one stop shop” service, and lack of paths of individual inclusion provided by one social services worker.(Chyłek, Mecych 2009).*

There was an awareness of huge discrepancies between Polish and Norwegian economic situations and measures, however, the peer review was still assessed as potential source of learning by the administration officials.

#### **BOX 2: New rules of cooperation between local PES and local SAC concerning MIP clients**

From 2009 persons who were registered as unemployed for a period longer than 6 months (or lost unemployment benefits more than 6 months ago) and were taking MIP allowances should sign a social contract with social assistance or take part in other activation form available to social assistance, be presented with a job offer or be assigned to some kind of ALMP instrument (training, apprenticeship, public or intervention works).

According to the “Assessment of Implementation of the European Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion”, some improvements in integrating the three pillars of active inclusion in Poland are noticeable:

- References to all three pillars may be found in strategic documents;
- More policies are taking into consideration all three pillars are implemented;
- There is a greater awareness of the need to integrate all three pillars.

Yet, no comprehensive strategy based on active inclusion concept has been prepared in years 2008-2012 and coordinated implementation of policies integrating all pillars has not occurred (see Topińska 2012).

Active inclusion has not become a topic of any broader public or political debate. In fact, it has also hardly been discussed at the level of Ministry of Labour and Social Policy which has been responsible for its implementation. It is considered a matter of Department of Social Assistance and Social Inclusion and other department do not treat it as their area of interest.

#### **2. 4 Participating country mix**

Comment papers<sup>23</sup>, which are the main source of analysis in this part of the report, show that the countries participating in the peer review were characterised by different administrative models and approaches towards social inclusion and labour market policies. Since the structure and content of comment papers was very diverse, also the scope and types of information provided was very differentiated.

- Austria: Austria was on the verge of social assistance reform, introducing new means-tested minimum income scheme accompanied by the better access to employment services for the most distanced from the labour market – especially the social assistance clients. The new measures were to be directed to people who are “fit for work” by mental, social and physical means. Programmes for the latter groups were to be organised at the regional level. Another goal was to improve integration of those services. However, as emphasised in the Austrian comment paper, creating one-stop-shops (such as Norwegian NAVs) proved impossible. Austria as a federal state – not a unitary state – would not be able to integrate central and local level, since social assistance was in competences of regions (Länder).
- Cyprus: In the comment paper some similarities between Norway and Cyprus were noticed: high labour market participation, low unemployment levels since 1980 – although in Cyprus – unlike Norway – unemployment rates increased sharply in 2008 due to the crisis. Also the unemployment of people with reduced work capacity was indicated as a recognised problem. Apart from that, some differences were emphasised. First of all, social assistance recipients constitute a very diverse group in Cyprus including people physically and mentally unable to work. Thus, the need to distinguish more clearly between those fit to work and those who will rely on state assistance in the social assistance system was emphasised. Second of all, employment and welfare measure are not integrated in Cyprus in contrast to Norway.
- Ireland: High level of economic growth since the second half of the 1990s is emphasised, which resulted in increase in number of people employed: from 1.47 million to 2.247 million in 2007. However, the economic crisis has affected the country and resulted in significant drop in employment: the level of employment in 2009 was comparable to 1999 (below 2 million). Number of people claiming

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<sup>23</sup> Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1024&langId=en&newsId=1433&furtherNews=yes>

unemployment benefits has risen from 170 000 in January 2008 to 423 600 in September 2009. This downturn created new challenges for social policy. Irish paper was focused on presenting own measures used to counteract unemployment and exclusion are based on lifecycle approach, i.e. targeted to four groups: children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities (the national partnership agreement ‘Towards 2016’). The key element of measures for people of working age, but also for some of the disabled was employment.

- Poland: As already shown in the previous part (2.3), Poland emphasised the difference in administrative arrangements and economic conditions.
- Romania: Romania as a new member of the EU was undergoing structural reforms in the area of labour market and social assistance (e.g. newly established National Employment Agency with 41 county agencies; introduction of new ALMP measures; cooperation with employers). It meant also rescaling anti-poverty policy in line with the EU standards. Increasing employment of vulnerable people became one of the main objectives in the field of social inclusion. Comment paper presented some detailed measures aimed at activation, but they were clearly focused on employment services. Thus, it may be assumed that integration of employment and welfare services is limited.
- Spain: The comment paper emphasised that Spain is a highly decentralised country. The central state is responsible for designing and managing of social security benefits and planning of employment policy including ALMP. Autonomous Communes are in charge of designing and implementing the social assistance and social services policies and managing employment policies. Thus, there are vast regional differences in terms of provided benefits, scope of social protection and duration of programmes as well as coordination problems. Although Spain has experienced a long period of economic growth before the current crisis the levels of unemployment have remained relatively high – especially in some groups (young people, women, older workers). In result of the economic crisis active inclusion policy plays has gained a particularly important role in the country.
- United Kingdom: Comment paper presented an account of policy developments in the area of providing ALMP to people with multiple and major barriers. It showed how different measures and arrangements had been tested from 1998 – including a merger of welfare and employment services. Several programmes for vulnerable groups are discussed in more detail. It seems that the main aim is to emphasise that UK has created own measures similar to QuP.

Finally, the countries participating in the peer review represented different welfare regimes:

- Corporatist or Continental regime: Austria;
- Liberal or Anglo-Saxon regime: Ireland, United Kingdom;
- Social-Democratic or Northern regime: Norway;
- Southern/Mediterranean model: Spain, Cyprus;
- Transitional, Central-Eastern, Post-communist regime: Romania, Poland<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The classification of post-communist countries in terms of welfare regimes is always problematic. There are immense differences between them in that respect, yet the case is too complex to discuss it here.

### **3. The participation to the peer review: actor's motivations and expectations**

#### **3.1 The drivers behind the organisation of the meeting: host country's motivations and expectations**

As far as the host country is concerned, no expectations of motives behind the organisation of the peer review were revealed explicitly in any of the documents related to the peer review. However, issues of particular salience were raised in the host country report prepared by the national expert from Norway:

- eligibility criteria for the programme and the selection of participants;
- provision and availability of schemes adjusted to the needs of target group;
- strategies for enabling user involvement;
- share of competences and organisation within the welfare agencies that deliver the services (Schaft 2009: 13).

Similarly to the above, also the thematic expert raised issues for discussion connected to the programme:

- How to balance welfare and employment perspective in the Qualification Programme;
- What the position and role of health care and health care professionals in the programme should be;
- Qualifying criteria for programme participants;
- How to strengthen client involvement
- How to improve assessment of client needs, skills, barriers etc;
- How to stimulate work trials and placement in the open labour market;
- Which elements of the Qualification Programme and its current operation do inspire policy makers and administrators from other countries (Prins 2009a: 10)

On the basis of the above a conclusion may be drawn that – since QuP was in the initial phase of implementation – the main motivation of the Norwegian side was the possibility to discuss matters considered problematic in QuP and learn about measures taken in other countries. That motivation was confirmed by the PPMI follow-up study of the peer review based – among other sources – on the expert interviews<sup>25</sup> (Budginaitė 2012). According to the report, it was an expectation of the Norwegian government to “get feedback on their programme, to learn how other countries are dealing with similar issues” (p. 14). Apart from that, topics for discussion proposed by the Norwegian side were also listed in the agenda of the meeting: recruitment of client groups, strengthening of client involvement, cooperation between employers and NGOs (Budginaitė 2012: 14).

#### **3.2 Other actors' motivations and expectations**

The peer countries declared different motivations and expectations in their comment papers. Not all of them expressed them explicitly, therefore in some cases motivations and expectations had to be found “between the lines”.

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<sup>25</sup> Two officials from the Norwegian Ministry of Labour were interviewed in the framework of the study.



- Austria: Since Austria was introducing own reform aimed at improving cooperation between welfare and employment administration and integration of the vulnerable groups with the labour market the awareness of problems tackled by QuP was high. Despite the already mentioned administrative differences between Austria and Norway, the peer review was viewed as a potential source of useful lessons for Austria in the area of planning and implementation of the reform.
- Cyprus: QuP was compared to the Cyprian programme ‘Vocational Training and Promotion of Public Assistance Recipients in the Labour Market’. Several potential areas in which the latter might have been improved thanks to the QuP experiences were pointed out: incentives for participation (benefits exceeding MIP transfers), comprehensive preparation for employment (not only vocational training, but a full-time programme imitating a regular job), joint labour market and social integration, selection criteria for programme participation (thorough assessment on entry, tailored services). It was, however, emphasised that there is too little randomised information about the impact of the programme to assess the possibility of its application in a different country. Surely, a few adjustments would have to be made on the Cyprian side to facilitate its implementation: not all people entitled to social assistance should be eligible to the program; welfare officers would have to undergo training to get familiar with different way of work and social welfare services would have to reorganised to secure better integration of social and employment services. Finally, the high cost of programme such as QuP were emphasised as potential obstacle (it would have to prove worth it).
- Ireland: Ireland presented many of its measures aimed at social inclusion and based on a lifecycle approach. The contribution to discussion paper also emphasised the importance of combating poverty and social exclusion through employment. It was clearly stated that the main expectation was to discuss matters that have arisen during the implementation of those measures against the background of the Norwegian experience with the QuP.
- Poland: Although Poland emphasised differences with the Norwegian context, there was openness to new experiences that might prove useful in a still developing context of coordination of three strands of active inclusion. In fact, Poland was eager to take part in those peer reviews which were organised as a direct answer to the emergence of new priorities at the EU level – in order to prepare better for the challenges connected to their implementation, e.g. the occurrence of active inclusion concept or the emphasis on combating poverty among children [Interview 8 - Polish administration official<sup>26</sup>].
- Romania: The aspect of development of new system of employment and welfare services due to the EU accession was emphasised in the comment paper. The main declared motivation of the country was, thus, gaining experience in the area of working with vulnerable clients and knowledge that would help in streamlining the passage from more passive into more active policies.
- Spain: The aims of the QuP were recognised as similar to Spanish minimum income schemes. But the high level of integration of services as well as the cost of the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview conducted for my PhD thesis.

programme were assumed problematic in terms of transferability. Several issues that were presented in the comment paper as particularly interesting in the peer review: learning more about coordination between employment and social services and the merger of the national insurance, the public employment and the social services; about reduction of dependency on social assistance through local cooperation; about incentives to maintain clients in the programme.

- United Kingdom: As in the case of Ireland, the comment paper presented mainly domestic measures and strategies. Similarities to the QuP were indicated, but also some doubts and questions concerning it were raised: 1) how successful it actually is (no comparison group; 2) how well were the agencies answering the multiple problems of people?; 3) was there any post-job support implemented?; 4) how was the goal of employment reached if there was no focus on employment (but on healthcare and social services)? No expectations or motivations are included directly. However, it seems from the general “tenor” of the paper, that an important aim was to show UK’s considerable experience with measures similar to QuP – in other words – to position itself as at least equally experienced partner willing to exchange some experiences.

Apart from the countries involved in the peer review some expectations and motivations of the European stakeholder participating in the meeting may be indicated.

- EAPN: In the comment paper the QuP was considered particularly relevant for EAPN network and national organisations because of the comprehensive support it offered to disadvantaged people. It put into practice the concept of active inclusion by taking into account sufficient income support and broad range of services as the means of facilitating inclusion of vulnerable groups into the labour market.

## **4. The peer review meeting**

### **4.1 The Agenda and main issues discussed**

As confirmed by the PPMI follow-up research and the analysis of Minutes, the meeting was conducted according to the agenda (Budginaitė 2012: 6, Minutes 2009). In the beginning of the meeting the director-general of the Norwegian Ministry of Labour welcomed everyone. Then the representative of Directorate-General, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission explained the origin of peer reviews, their general purpose and current developments. He also explained the relevance of the Norwegian peer review from the perspective of the EU level, i.e. the Commission Recommendation on active inclusion. Afterwards, Norwegian officials from the Ministry of Labour introduced the programme and provided background information about it. Subsequently, discussion and question-and-answers session was opened. The second part of the meeting started with the independent expert’s presentation the results of QuP evaluation. That part was also concluded with a general discussion. The next step was the site visit in two Labour and Welfare Administration offices in Oslo (NAV Grorud and NAV Østensjø), followed by a discussion (Minutes 2009).

The second day begun with EAPN’s comment to the peer review. Then discussion paper and contributions from peer countries were presented, followed by a discussion referring to the three aspects: work ability assessment, cooperation with employers and transferability of the

elements of QuP. Later on, Welfare Alliance<sup>27</sup> was asked for a statement – which was the only element of the peer review meeting not planned previously. According to the PPMI research there was some kind of a dispute between the representatives of WA and Norway officials, probably caused by the very short time allocated to the statement (see Budginaitė 2012: 6). The peer review meeting was summed up by the thematic expert, who pointed out the most important issues discussed and lessons learned (Minutes 2009). Final words were delivered by the EC representative and the Norwegian Ministry of Labour representative (Minutes 2009: 26)

The interviewed person in Polish administration did not remember the agenda very well and had to look into the materials from the peer review. What was remembered was the division into discussions and site visits and the latter were very appreciated as particularly instructive.

Ten key issues were raised in the discussion (Budginaitė 2012: 8; Minutes 2009; Short report 2009):

- Programme objectives: Since QuP applies a broad and integrated approach questions were raised concerning its main goal (employment; reducing reliance on social assistance; well-being).
- Programme's voluntary character: At first glance, taking part in the QuP appeared voluntary, since it required application from a potential participant. However, in the course of discussion it came out, that in some cases not agreeing to participate might result in reduction of welfare benefits.
- Client commitment: There was also a discussion whether participants should sign a contract when entering QuP (supported by Poland and UK). That matter triggered a particularly heated discussion.
- Benefit levels and incentives: Part of the discussion focused on income received by participants. Some of the stakeholders had doubts whether the income is sufficient to survive. The issue of relative freedom of case managers in granting it.
- Participation criteria: The discretion of NAV officers in qualifying for the programme was discussed. Some of the participants were worried that mainly those who gave hope for quick employment would be qualified – especially that there was a quantitative target to be reached.
- Needs assessment: The development of initial assessment tool devoted to diagnosing potential and competences (not only needs and problems) was proposed by participants to supplement work ability assessment. The Norwegian side admitted there are plans to introduce something similar in the future. The UK representative suggested making a continual tool to avoid simplistic answers (capable/incapable).
- Improvement of programme content: Suggestions were made to organise training with NAV officials as well as health care official who may not be familiar enough employment issues.
- Merger of social and employment services: Some of the participants were interested in the integration of employment and social services in practice. This subject was discussed more thoroughly during the site visits.
- NGOs: There were differences in interpretation of the role of NGOs – their role in Norway (and other Scandinavian countries) seemed not as crucial as in other countries as far as providing help to the most excluded is concerned, since public sector is responsible for most of the programmes.

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<sup>27</sup> Welfare Alliance (Velferdsalliansen) represents EAPN in Norway.

- Data collection: Some of the participants suggested adding outcome and performance indicators to measure the result of QuP better.

The most vivid discussion concerned the aspect of client commitment. It was triggered by the question posed by one of the Polish officials. She wondered whether programme participants sign any kind of contract with NAV. According to her, it would clarify the obligations and rights of both sides. Apart from that it would be an additional incentive for clients. This voice was supported by the UK official, who emphasised the aspect of being aware of sanctions.

The Norwegian official explained that there was no contract – motivation of clients, not legal agreement was the main purpose. This view was supported by the independent expert who emphasised that contract would not work in case of Norway, since the society is based on mutual trust. Representative of European EAPN indicated that QuP is addressed to vulnerable groups who often had to sell all their assets to support themselves. Thus, “sanctioning them would leave them in poverty, while forcing them to sign a contract would turn them into criminals” (Minutes 2009: 11).

This discussion touch the subject of the relation between state and citizen, which came out to be very different in Poland and UK than in Norway. In the former contract was viewed as the basis of establishing relation, whereas in the later trust in citizen was the main value. Similar difference in main values was revealed when the UK official asked about the cost-benefit analysis of the programme. The Norwegian side responded that costs are important, but raising the quality of life of individuals is also of the essence, since “providing a decent life for citizens” is “a part of state’s role” (Minutes 2009: 8).

#### 4.2 “Tenor” of discussions and roles played by participant

In the PPMI follow-up research the overall atmosphere of the peer review was assessed as pleasant and friendly. It was described as “one of the better ones” by the EC representative (Budginaitė 2012: 24). This was confirmed in the interview with the Polish official, who participated in it:

*(...) The atmosphere was open and safe. Maybe because the room was small (...). We didn't have the possibility to use power point presentations – and everyone agreed we resign from using them. Every county was asked for a short statement and then we has a spontaneous discussion. A very good relation was established between the main table and other peer review participants. (...). I think it was an atmosphere of cooperation and trust.”*  
[Interview 2 – Polish administration official ].

The interviewed person considered the role of the EC representative and the thematic expert as very important in creating a good space for discussion. As moderators, they built *interpretative consensus* between participants.

According to the report from the mentioned follow-up research, Poland and UK were indicated as the most active by the interviewed participants of the meeting (Budginaitė 2012). What is interesting, the interviewed Polish official indicated UK, Austria<sup>28</sup> and Cyprus as the most active during discussions. Apart from that, a tension between Austrian and Cyprian

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<sup>28</sup> The interview thought at first that it was a representative of Germany and corrected it only after checking the documents from the peer review.

representative was indicated in the interview, which was interpreted in terms of division into poorer and richer: in result, the mentioned persons presented things from different perspectives [Interview 2 - Polish administration official]. However, this observation was not confirmed in the analysis of Minutes.

Another source of tension was the already mentioned (part 4.1) heated discussion over the issue of signing contracts. The interviewed Polish peer review participant called it a subject of “dignity”:

*An interesting issue which heated the discussion concerned the dignity of a person – social assistance client and unemployed. (...) And we had this discussion whether this signature [under the contract – MZ] is empowering clients and gives them dignity or the other way round. And this lady [from EAPN] said this is absolutely out of the question, because in that case the client is treated as a thief who wants to take advantage and do not deliver anything – and contracts shouldn't be practised at all. My view was that the signature mobilises clients, it obliges the clients and causes that they feel important. I remember this discussion was very interesting and had this cultural dimension [Interview 2 - Polish administration official].*

The spill-over of the client commitment issue was the short but intense exchange between the Welfare Alliance and the representatives of the Ministry of Labour concerning social rights in Norway. The former emphasised that contract would pose a danger of giving too much power to NAV personnel – they could refuse clients benefits if they rejected participation in QuP. The reason for that was to be the fact that minimum income is not a social right in Norway. This was strongly objected by the latter, emphasising that every citizen has a right to income support only the amount is not guaranteed. This exchange revealed some tension between those two sides.

The controversy regarding the issue of rights was confirmed in the “Host country assessment: synthesis report” prepared by OSE and PPMI (OSE&PPMI 2012) . The report also shed light on the fact, that a general discussion over the guaranteed minimum income was going on at that time in Norway. Also another point of criticism was mentioned – a high drop-out rate in the QuP. Yet, this aspect was not confirmed clearly by the analysis of Minutes from the meeting (the conclusion was probably based on the interviews with the participants of the peer review).

### **4.3 Main conclusions of the meeting**

At the end of the meeting participants shared their thoughts about the transferability of the QuP experiences. Doubts were expressed by representatives of Austria and Spain whether such a merger of welfare and employment services which happened in case of NAV reform would be possible in their countries. Polish and Romanian representatives as well as the UK national expert emphasised that QuP is an example how different services and different administrative levels may work together, which they find useful and encouraging (Minutes 2009).

In his conclusions during the last day of the meeting the thematic expert suggested three lessons were learned from the peer review. First of all, it contributed to the EU-wide

dissemination of knowledge about programmes for people with multiple barriers, which is generally scarce. Second of all, QuP showed that measures for multi-problem groups are expensive and need to be long-term, while the effects take a long time. Finally, it added to the knowledge about limiting the phenomenon of “revolving door”, i.e. coming back on social assistance benefits.

Finally – at the end of the meeting – the EC representative emphasised that the conclusions of the peer review would contribute to the active inclusion process. The final word belonged to the representative of the Norwegian Ministry of Labour, who claimed that the peer review inspired the Norwegian side to “move forward with the QuP” (Minutes 2009).

Thematic expert provided a more systematic conclusions and lessons learned in the synthesis report:

- In order to reach the most vulnerable groups a programme should combine measures from different areas (health, housing, employment, self-confidence) and bring together different agencies.
- The provision of regular income for participants helps to limit number of drop-outs and serves as an additional tool to stimulate participation.
- Case manager in programmes for vulnerable groups have to be prepared to address multiple problems of programme participants.
- The Norwegian case shows that central and local agencies can successfully work together to the benefit clients.
- Programmes addressing vulnerable groups tend to focus on social and health need and find it difficult to direct attention also to vocational skills and job search activities.
- Countries differ in terms of approach to clients – in some trust and client motivation come first in others there is an emphasis to sign an agreement with clients to stimulate participation.
- Agencies implementing new programmes should ensure that adequate conditions (training, tools) and time to the workforces is provided and that the productivity targets are adapted (p. 28-29).

#### **4.4 The host country delegation: attitudes and overall opinion about the meeting**

Two persons representing the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy were selected to take part in the peer review. The reason for resigning from a national expert and choosing two MLSP representatives was that the peer review addressed subjects traditionally managed by two different ministerial units – Department of Social Assistance and Social Inclusion and Department of Labour Market.

As recalled by the interviewed participant of the peer review, the time for preparation to the peer review was short and intense. Both participants had to invest private time in that process, because of the multitude of professional obligations. Their superiors considered everyday tasks of primary importance in comparison to preparations to peer review:

*Please remember that I had other duties at that time. Ant this peer review was not treated seriously [by the superiors – MZ]. I felt as though I was doing it just for myself. [Interview 2 - Polish administration official].*

Apart from the above, the person had to decide what to present, because no one from the superiors was familiar with the subject of active inclusion:

*The subject was so new, that no one from the superiors had any suggestions concerning what we should present. It was our decision how we describe the situation in Poland. [Interview 2 - Polish administration official].*

Nevertheless, as suggested in the interview, both persons were eager to come and learn something new about developments in other EU member states in the area of active inclusion.

As mentioned earlier, Polish representatives – along with the UK representatives – were considered the most active during the meeting by other participants. They triggered the discussion about the role of signing contracts with participants of programmes. Apart from that, they also asked quite many questions. Their overall attitude may be described as eager to learn as much as possible about particular aspects of the programme and to assess it against the background of known measures – especially those used in Poland.

The interviewed participant of the peer review did not see (remember) any weaknesses of the QuP. As for the strengths, three aspects of the programme were mentioned: the joint work of officials representing central and local level aimed at realising a common goal; the multidimensionality of the programme; and the high level of individualisation in approach to the clients. Apart from that, the interviewee was astonished with the close and flexible cooperation between NAVs and employers – which is generally not the case with Polish PES:

*This site visits made me realise that employers are within reach. They just phone to the selected employer and agree on the day when the unemployed should come. It was new to us how flexibly they cooperate with employers. I think that in case of Polish PES this cooperation has a secondary importance. [Interview 2 - Polish administration official].*

Three aspects were considered particularly interesting from the Polish point of view: added value of cooperation between central and local level; broad scope of freedom given to the individual advisors in their work with clients (the possibility to contact psychologists, doctors and other specialist and ask for assistance); the widespread information about the recruitment to the programme, which is highly uncommon in Poland in case of activation programmes. According to the interview, those aspects were to a large extent missing in Polish approach to vulnerable groups and should be considered in policy planning.

## **5. The “consequences” of the peer review**

### **5.1 EU level**

No references to the peer review were found in any of the OMC documents (e.g., Joint reports and SPC reports drafted after 2009). However, QuP was mentioned during some other peer reviews (Spanish peer review “Modernising and activating measures relating to work incapacity” from 2010; another Norwegian peer review “Making a success of integrating immigrants into the labour market” from 2010). Some references to the QuP might have been found also in documents produced in various member states: e.g. on the website of Spanish Ministry of Labour and Immigration (see Budginaitė 2012: 17-18). Finally, after the peer review in Norway the QuP was discussed during the SPC meeting (OSE&PPMI 2012: 33).

No networking effects engaging administration representatives from countries participating in the Norwegian peer review were identified in the PPMI follow-up research. However, the thematic expert approached some of the participants in reference to another EU project<sup>29</sup>. Apart from that, thematic expert was asked by the Dutch authorities to give presentation about the QuP. In result, Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment asked the expert to conduct a study of the situation of people with multiple barriers and draft a report (OSE&PPMI 2012).

Finally, thanks to the experts and stakeholders, the peer review had also some significance as far as feeding the debates at EU level is concerned. The synthesis report occurred on the website of ASTRI consultancy (where the thematic expert was affiliated). Apart from that the information about QuP was included in the EAPN report from the conference about minimum income schemes, held on 24 September 2010.

## 5.2 Domestic level

Participants of the peer review from the Polish side prepared a short report containing summary of the most important topics discussed during the meeting and general conclusions (Chyłek, Mecych 2009). The latter referred three matters. First of all, Norwegian experiences might be taken into consideration in the further process of integrating areas of labour market and social assistance. Although the issue is not elaborated in the report, some further conclusion may be drawn from the Minutes from the peer review meeting and from the interview. MLSP representatives emphasised the importance of coordination between different administrative levels in order to provide complex support to vulnerable groups. This issue has been addressed in Poland only to some extent although there were plans for further improvement in that area. Thus the authors of the report probably suggested learning on the Norwegian experiences with merger of welfare and employment administration.

Second of all, more thorough knowledge of Norwegian experiences might be gained through bilateral cooperation or further exchange of information on the EU forum. As shown in the previous part, the impact of the Norwegian peer review at the EU level was modest – although it was discussed during SPC meeting. As far as bilateral cooperation is concerned no steps towards that were identified in the study. The interviewed person did not engage in any networking, except from commenting the Minutes and helping in the PPMI follow up study. It was probably connected to the lack of encouragement from the superiors.

Finally, QuP should be treated as an example how active inclusion may be implemented and how important it is to develop an individualised and holistic approach towards vulnerable groups. Also that matter was not given any further consideration at the ministerial level. No concrete proposal of utilizing experience from the peer review has been put forward in the report.

The report was shown to the superiors of administration officials who participated in the peer review. The participant of the peer review proposed distributing it also to social partners and third sector partners, but did not get the “green light” to do it. To this person’s knowledge it was also not debated on at the ministerial level. It may be assumed that the matter was not considered important enough to allow the employees to spend more time on it.

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<sup>29</sup> The *Host country assessment* does not reveal which representatives and what kind of project are referred to.



MLSP operates in hierarchical way and on the basis of strong departmental division. It has two consequences referring to the subject of dissemination of peer review conclusions. First of all, as in traditional bureaucracy the primary obligations of the ministry employees are connected to legal acts. Thus, the Department of Social Assistance and Social Inclusion is focused on performing tasks related to the Act on social assistance, whereas the Department of Labour Market to the tasks related to the Act on promotion of employment and labour market institutions. All other tasks are deemed secondary. Second of all, the departmental division results in separation off areas of labour market and social assistance. There is a strong resistance towards ideas of bringing those areas together, since this is against the bureaucratic interests. This may be the reason why the idea of active inclusion is approached with caution in the MLSP.

However, ideas from peer reviews are disseminate also through other channels. Knowledge gathered during peer reviews by different participants is activated in different situations. As one of the MLSP officials put it:

*There is no direct translation (...). Some knowledge base is cumulated and may be always used. When some programmes or strategies are being prepared... when someone has been participating in some form of sharing knowledge or OMC – I have seen it numerous times that some things were included in those documents. (...). And we are facing a huge change in employment policy (...). I will be a deep systemic change. And (...) most of the principal elements of it were seen elsewhere. [Interview 1 - Polish administration official].*

Therefore, even though conclusions from peer reviews may not be distributed further, it is possible that the knowledge gathered thanks to participation in them is activated in situations such as drafting new programmes or preparing strategic documents.

## **6. Conclusions**

Peer review discussed in the report was organised in reference to the Commission Recommendation on active inclusion from October 2008. It concerned Norway Qualifications Programme providing comprehensive support to vulnerable groups. QuP combined income support with wide range of social, health and employment services which was very much in line with the three pillars of active inclusion: sufficient income support; inclusive labour markets; access to quality services.

Polish administration decided to take part in it for two reasons. First of all, active inclusion was a relatively new concept at that time and Norwegian peer review offered a chance to gather knowledge about how the idea might be put into practise. Second of all, it tackled the issue of merging welfare and employment administration and engaging different administrative levels in cooperation in order to provide comprehensive support to clients with multiple barriers. Whereas, cooperation between PES and SAC has been an enduring problem in Poland. At that time a new rule was implemented aimed at increasing that cooperation and they were plans for its further improvement. Thus, learning from Norwegian experiences might have been useful to that end – even though there were no plans to merge those administrations.

As confirmed by the follow-up study of the peer review, Minutes and the interview conducted in Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy – the meeting was conducted in an open and cooperative atmosphere. Participants seemed very engaged in the discussion. Only

one subject – signing contracts with clients – triggered more heated exchange between different sides. The Norwegian side considered signing agreement with clients inappropriate, since it would mean they are not trusted and treated as potential “free riders”. Whereas, Polish representatives viewed it as a source of empowerment and motivation. The UK official emphasised also the aspect of awareness of sanctions in consequence of breaking the agreement. This debate was summed up as cultural in nature by the Norwegian expert.

Even though the meeting was considered successful by all parties involved, its effects were limited. The most interesting consequences at the EU level seem to be the presentation of the QuP at the SPC meeting and in the EAPN report from the conference on minimum income schemes.

Consequences at the domestic level were very limited. No networking effects were identified. Apart from that, conclusions from the peer review prepared by the officials participating in the meeting were only read by their superiors. Further distribution of the report was blocked by them.

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