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## ***Resilient households and welfare state institutions<sup>2</sup>***

### ***Summary***

The subject of the analysis are methods of coping with difficult life situations, seen by the respondents who take part in the RESCuE project. The main purpose of the article is to show how they perceive the role of various institutions of the welfare state in remedial strategies adopted by various people or families, including themselves, in crisis situations. It was also presented how respondents evaluate the effects of actions taken by social welfare and other welfare state agencies. The social welfare system is an important element of remedial practice in the studied areas. It is based primarily on public institutions. However, these institutions are perceived as ineffective and inefficient, and their actions as leading often to various undesirable phenomena, including passivity and dependence on state aid.

**Key words:** remedial strategies, social assistance, welfare state

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## ***Introduction***

The aim of this article is to identify the socio-economic and cultural practices of coping with the effects of the economic crisis in 2008 by households living in poverty as part of the RESCuE project — *Patterns of Resilience during Socioeconomic Crises among Households in Europe* — in four selected communities of the Silesian Voivodship: two urban and two rural.

The analysis of the quality of the social assistance system and other less formal elements of remedial measures applied by rural and urban farms play a significant role in the following study. There is also no mention of the importance of non-governmental organizations as institutions providing help and support. For example, social welfare policy is pursued by both public and central government authorities, but increasingly also by the non-governmental and church sector and the social economy sector. There are also frequent activities of informal groups, including family and relatives. The empirical base of the following considerations were narrative interviews conducted with the vulnerable households and the group of experts chosen according to the criteria defined in the Project (see: Annex).

### ***Reforming the welfare system or alleviating the negative consequence of great transformation. Social welfare in the eyes of the experts and citizens***

In 1990, in the first stage of the process of decentralization of state administration, wide scope of tasks within social policy was attributed to communes. The social welfare system created after 1989 assumed that the state, namely, has the possibility of *employing employees who agree on employment*. He was not supposed to be a guardian. Mechanisms created 20 years ago 20 years did not work. Lasting from month to month, from one allowance to the next, it became a method of living for 1.3 million families.

Growing unemployment, increasing impoverishment of many social groups and larger number of tasks resulting from implementing new legal regulations concerning employment and rehabilitation of disabled people or mental health care caused that social welfare centres had to focus on temporary, aid activities instead of preventive or activating activities (Błądowski, 2002/2003; Hryniewicz, 2004; Leś, 2002/2003; Rymśza, 2002).

Legal changes mentioned above, implemented before Polish accession to the European Union, gave hope that social welfare model of “protective” state would be changed (Rymśza, 2002) and new model of active social policy would be built. Since political transformation in 1989, and after 2004, many mistakes in realization of this idea have been made, which resulted in increasing serious social problems. As a consequence of the neo-liberal orientation of the Polish political elites are expectations of Polish people are still not meet, however, many people still hope for more active social policy. To some extent, it is confirmed by the results of surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre in 2013 (CBOS, 2013). Show the majority of Polish people expects that main priority of the state will be social protection of its citizens against negative effects of free

market, including the risk of free market competition. Such attitude implies a positive attitude towards the idea of welfare state, but not to the idea of activating state. Resilient households developing or maintaining resilience and fail or win but also may choose not to claim benefits, negative treatment or side effects are anticipated (Promberger et al., 2014, pp. 40–41).

In the Polish social welfare system, public institutions are very important, they are located at every administrative level of the territorial self-government as well as at the central level. Transformation of solutions in the area of social policy in recent years, taking place against other changes: demographic, economic, cultural, in work systems, as well as in the family, cause that the social welfare system must be adapted to new needs, problems and challenges. This is due, on the one hand, to new problems and social risks that were not known before, as well as the deepening of existing social problems and deficits. At the same time, democratization processes result in a greater willingness of citizens to participate in social and social processes, a readiness for greater co-responsibility for social well-being.

Until recently, in social policy, the focus on financial benefits and redistribution of funds still prevailed, but now we are moving to the development of individualized services available to citizens. In order for services to develop, on the one hand, we need conscious social services that will notice and will want to implement a new paradigm, and on the other — to awaken the needs of citizens in services, because some people are not aware that some services can be shared and produced. The following article presents the main problem areas faced by today's households, remedial strategies applied regarding the emerging crises, characteristics of the Polish social assistance system about the concept of the welfare state and the respondents' opinions on the provision of assistance services.

Presentation of the above contents would not be possible were it not for the results of research carried out as part of the project in the context of resilient households and welfare state institutions<sup>3</sup>. Researchers from different European countries tried to present the influence of the welfare state on the models of households' functioning in problematic situations. Welfare state practices can in principle be supportive, neutral, or ignoring or restrictive in their impacts on risk exposed household's practices (Promberger et al., 2014). In this respect, Poland is a difficult case, since the choice of a free market economy and a democratic state of law made in 1989 did not go as well as a specific choice of the welfare state model.

The development of welfare institutions began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and lasted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the increasingly inefficient social systems entered the phase of radical reforms, which continue in principle to the present. A significant part of the Western experience thus omitted the sovereign Polish statehood. Most of the time our country was directly or indirectly controlled by the superpowers, which, although they were developing their own welfare institutions, did

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<sup>3</sup> The guidelines for the Work Package 9: *Resilient households and welfare state institutions* for RESCuE. Project were elaborated by the members of Greek team: Nelli Kambouri, Soula Marinoudi and Georgia Petraki.

not allow Poland to choose its path of social policy. And when in 1989 we were to build the foundations of a new welfare state, then “old Europe” seemed to be leaving it. At this point, there is the problem of incommensurability of Polish experiences with Western experiences. We were always a country on the outskirts of the West, to which all economic changes were delayed. The lack of an independent path to capitalism meant the difficulty in creating a model of the welfare state, which is a continuation of this way, as it was in Great Britain, in Germany or in Sweden. Too many dramatic breaks occurred in the development and too great havoc in the minds of the Poles they did. It is not surprising then that we are among the European nations with the lowest level of trust in other people and state institutions. The increase in the level of our lives and becoming similar to the West do not have a significant impact on the way the Pole thinks about politics and the state. As Janusz Czapiński notes: “We live in a country of more and more effective individuals and an extremely ineffective community. (...) It is difficult to find examples of political and, more generally, institutional incentives for Poles, starting with the education system and ending with the parliament, to greater mutual trust and greater willingness to cooperate. The passage of time will not change anything” (Czapiński, Panek, 2012).

The Polish welfare state resembles a liberal model in some points, and in some it is conservative. Social assistance in the form of all kinds of benefits is at a very low level. One could argue that in the case of the unemployed, it should be an incentive to return to the labor market. However, it is difficult to refer to the Anglo-Saxon value system, when the reason for low benefits is simply the lack of adequate amount of cash. The financial situation of many chronically ill or disabled people is often only tolerable because they can benefit from family support, volunteers, or private donors.

It is the large share of family institutions around care services that brings us closer to the conservative model. In this respect, we are a bit like the Mediterranean countries in which multi-generational families living together are a mainstay of older and young people.

Europeanisation of our social policy played important role through the implementation of proven practices and social solutions from EU countries and from the activities of supranational institutions has given a positive impulse in the last decade introducing changes in the approach and implementation of social policy. In addition, integration with the EU it enabled emigration and employment and education for Poles in other countries, which is not irrelevant, considering the unemployment rate in Poland before 2004 (20%).

The harmonization of regulations and the inclusion of Poland in coordination introduced higher standards social and better policy effectiveness. Cohesion policy and transfer of considerable financial resources it certainly results in faster socio-economic development of our country. After the accession, national institutions and social services strengthened, new solutions were introduced legal and financial.

Statements of our respondents show that the main current problem is unemployment. Recent years are the period of changes in Polish society due to transformation of economy after 1989. This transformation included, among other, restructuring of the sector of state enterprises and many other changes, which resulted in the problem of unemployment.

The respondents, indicating the problem of unemployment, often referred to poverty leading to social exclusion as a result of dependence on social welfare. „Unemployment for sure, the fact that people got used to social welfare. People do not want to work even if they can because they know that social welfare centre will give them something” (PL/U/Ex/03). The problem of low income or unstable employment have also emerged, and benefits from social welfare has become competitive towards income from legal work or aid benefits supplemented low income from illegal work.

Emerging above problems forced the respondents to apply resilient strategies, reducing the effects of lack of job. The most frequent activities include:

- Extending time that the respondents spend at work, these job are usually taken illegally, outside official workplace.
- Activities related to illegal work are combined with gaining support from aid institutions. This strategy allows people to be entitled to benefits and also gain additional income. According to the experts, these practices are justified when they help family to survive. However, if people have high income and spend such benefits on luxury consumer goods, these activities are assessed negatively as a form of “cunning” and proof of inefficiency of aid system.
- People are more and more interested in poultry farming and cultivation of vegetables and fruits. It is not a regular gainful activity, but it allows to meet people’s own needs and save some money for other purposes.
- An interesting form of resilience observed by the experts and confirmed in the interviews are the attempts to earn some money selling handicraft products. It becomes an additional source of income.

In many cases, strategies of dealing with crisis in urban spaces were and to a large extent are still connected with help that people get outside institution of social welfare (family, neighbours). Ability to deal with crisis is also related to flexibility and ability to gain new, useful skills, therefore, our respondents often mention courses and workshops.

Common feature of resilient strategies is support of the family. It is clearly seen in the case of one of the respondents who “goes begging” to her mother or in-laws (PL/U/11). Such statements can be found very often. There is also some kind of intergenerational transmission. On the one hand, the respondents are supported by their families (if it is possible) in their adult and independent life, and they often declare that will make any efforts to ensure their children as best start to adult life as possible.

A phenomenon of unemployment and other problems mentioned by the respondents are not only social and economic, but also a political problem, therefore, solving it has become a challenge for the state. Majority of the respondents admit that current social system is not adapted to changing social reality, new problems and they may not count on social assistance from the state: “The state does not help me. There are not jobs, only junk contracts. If you get a commission contract and apartment is indebted, the bailiff will take you everything. Therefore, I can only work illegally but what about my future pension?” (PL/U/01).

According to the experts, there is an inconsistency between idea and practice. Social welfare institutions, and the whole system does not fit in with problems of current reality. Therefore, this system is ineffective and dysfunctional. Social work is oriented more to ostensible activities, more to quantity than quality. According to the respondents, current social welfare system does not help and even increases the sense of helplessness among poor people, who treat such support as their life activity: „Many people here do not want to work even if they can because social welfare centre always gives them something. They get money for rent, textbooks etc. Such people even say that working is not profitable for them” (PL/U/Ex/04).

According to the respondents, Polish welfare state, instead of helping those who need it, leads people to helplessness and dependence on financial help: “There is such tendency and it is a big problem. I see this problem in a place where I live. For example, my friend who has three children. A father of her first child is a guy who is in prison, and two children have a different father. My friend has a family allowance, she also receives benefits. Her monthly income is about PLN 2300, I wouldn’t earn so much even if I had higher education and full-time job. She says openly that she can earn only PLN 1200 because she has an elementary education and she may lose all benefits” (PL/U/03).

People who are dependent on state financial support for a long time become permanent clients of social welfare centres. It mainly concerns the unemployed. Unemployment in connection with slight activity of these people and their low qualifications make them dependent on social help for many years. Return to labour market is the only way out for such people.

Our respondents perceive welfare state and its institutions both as helpful and ignoring. They are helpful because, for many people, it is an important source of support in crisis situations. However, it seems that the make use of this support usually when other source of help (making own efforts, family) will fail or are not available: “People are helpless here... Some people have everything for the asking, and some people have to work very hard. For some people it is ridiculous, because they have money and those who work hard are fools... However, financial support from social welfare centre is sometimes salutary. Children have dinners, they receive subsidies to clothes and textbooks. Members in my library say that without this support, their situation would be tragic” (PL/U/Ex/01).

However, they claim that welfare state does not care about the way, in which aid is distributed, therefore, the poorest people often do not get enough help. In this way, instead of being activated, citizens are made dependent on its help.

### ***Resilient households and the local welfare institutions. Expectations and ambiguities***

The research conducted in four local communities in Upper Silesia and Dąbrowa Basin — two rural and two urban, with different levels of urbanization of space, as well as culturally and ethnically different, show that public institutions dominate in resilience

of urban and rural respondents — labour offices, institutions of specialist help. Aid non-public institutions and the Church emerge more frequent in urban spaces.

Statements of our respondents show that the main current problem is unemployment. Recent years are the period of changes in Polish society due to transformation of economy after 1989. This transformation included, among other, restructuring of the sector of state enterprises and many other changes, which resulted in the problem of unemployment.

People living in rural areas were also affected by unemployment. Demographic and professional changes in rural areas that took place after 2000 were one of the most dynamic since the end of the Second World War. After quick rise in unemployment in the first years of transformation, from 1994 till the end of 1999, there is a downward tendency in general number of the unemployed, both in cities and villages (Siekieski, 1999, p. 209). Procedures of restructuring of industry caused that the owners of small farms, which were not a sufficient source of income, were affected by reduction of employment.

The respondents, indicating the problem of unemployment, often referred to poverty leading to social exclusion as a result of dependence on social welfare. „Unemployment for sure, the fact that people got used to social welfare. People do not want to work even if they can because they know that social welfare centre will give them something” (PL/U/Ex/03). The problem of low income or unstable employment have also emerged, and benefits from social welfare has become competitive towards income from legal work or aid benefits supplemented low income from illegal work.

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The majority of our respondents, especially those from rural areas, was brought up in poor families, therefore, learning how to “manage” was a part of their educational process, which is now passed to subsequent generations. Poverty passed down from generation to generation more often concerns the respondents living in a rural environment: “Poverty is permanent. We also were afraid that we wouldn’t have enough money to buy food” (PL/R/02). The respondents living in towns/cities more often emphasize that their childhood

was free from the problem of poverty: „our parents earned enough so we could but anything” (PL/U/02) or “Our childhood was very happy. Our parents devoted a lot of time to us. At the weekends, when mom did not have a duty, we were going to the cinema, walking in the mountains. We were in good relations with family and neighbours. They did not earn too much but we were not poor. Nowadays, people live on a shoestring” (PL/U/04).

In many cases, strategies of dealing with crisis in urban spaces were and to a large extent are still connected with help that people get outside institution of social welfare (family, neighbours). Ability to deal with crisis is also related to flexibility and ability to gain new, useful skills, therefore, our respondents often mention courses and workshops.

In general, aid institutions are perceived as ineffective, wrongly addressed, bringing more harm than good. Our respondents criticize these institutions for, above all, ineptitude and unfair distribution of help. According to the respondents, the whole system makes people helpless, especially the unemployed.

Our respondents also feel that the distribution of aid is unfair. Most of them claim that people who do not need support from public funds, make use of social welfare to a similar extent as very poor people: „People here fell that they should get something because they have many children. I understand that but it should be different, not like in...” (PL/U/Ex/02).

Moreover, the whole sector of public help is highly feminized. It is dominated by women. It also seems that women are more involved in social initiatives.

If local authorities perceive the importance of social problems, local actions and various forms of help are developed, motivating the residents and contribute to the development of active resilient strategies and activities of non-governmental organizations and many informal groups. If local authorities are not sensitive to social issues, passivity and demanding attitudes dominate. There are not enough grass-roots initiatives, motivation and mobilization to improving difficult situations. The situation in rural areas is similar — demanding attitudes are frequent.

According to the respondents, an obligation of caring for poor people lies, above all, with local and state authorities, however, help they receive is often insufficient and improperly distributed.

Common feature of resilient strategies is support of the family. It is clearly seen in the case of one of the respondents who “goes begging” to her mother or in-laws (PL/U/11). Such statements can be found very often. There is also some kind of intergenerational transmission. On the one hand, the respondents are supported by their families (if it is possible) in their adult and independent life, and they often declare that will make any efforts to ensure their children as best start to adult life as possible.

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Our respondents perceive welfare state and its institutions both as helpful and ignoring. They are helpful because, for many people, it is an important source of support in crisis situations. However, it seems that the make use of this support usually when other source of help (making own efforts, family) will fail or are not available: "People are helpless here... Some people have everything for the asking, and some people have to work very hard. For some people it is ridiculous, because they have money and those who work hard are fools... However, financial support from social welfare centre is sometimes salutary. Children have dinners, they receive subsidies to clothes and textbooks. Members in my library say that without this support, their situation would be tragic" (PL/U/Ex/01).

However, they claim that welfare state does not care about the way, in which aid is distributed, therefore, the poorest people often do not get enough help. In this way, citizens are made dependent on its help, instead of being activated.

Non-public sector is rather poorly developed and supplements public system. It is based to a large extent on charity, but there are also elements of involvement. Situation in urban communities is a little better than in rural communities.

Despite the fact that the concept of civil society, together with an idea of passing part of state obligations to the institutions „closer to a citizen”, is an effective and proven

solution in Western countries, in Poland, this concept is still controversial. Such situation is caused by many factors. Non-governmental organizations are often perceived only as consumers of public funds, or as organizations caring only for their own interests. In addition, state structures often see non-profit institutions as a competition for the concept of social system conformed with actual political trends. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations are perceived by public administration bodies and founders of money as not too professional, therefore, these organizations are treated as unreliable partner. There is also a new important context in the above problems — integration processes with the European Union. These processes put non-governmental organizations in new realities, giving them new opportunities of development, financing and exchange of experiences with other European institutions, but requires more professionalization and standardization of activities taken by these organizations. Such situation gives non-governmental organizations both new opportunities and risks in their important function, although subsidiary in comparison to the role of the state, in solving social problems. Moreover, it forces non-governmental organizations to adapt to new realities of functioning caused by civilization progress, social and economic development of the society, forcing them to participate in new areas of social policy.

Non-public institutions — foundations, associations — usually operate within public system. These organizations are treated as supplements public system, which realize public tasks for money (of communes). However, they are not treated as equal partner, source of knowledge and example of innovative solutions, because they are often financially dependent. However, there are also some grassroots social initiatives, especially among young people.

The Church plays a specific role — everything depends on a parish priest. If they are involved in aid activities, it is usually charity.

Majority of our respondents think that local institutions of social welfare do not play an important role in activating communities, organizing common strategies of coping with everyday problems and developing structures of social welfare beyond the state. In their opinion, such institutions make people passive and do not care about improving the quality of life: “You can only receive benefits if you do not exceed a threshold, and that’s all. People are not motivated to organize anything. Without my personal motivation to look for a job, to organize something for a child, to meet with the neighbours, I would just sit there collecting benefits. Many people here live in such a way” (PL/U/06).

Different opinions are expressed in the environments, in which local government support such type of activity. We may see it in such communities, in which not only visit social welfare centres, and they are mobilized by establishing institutions or initiating activation projects such as Programs of Local Activity: “You know, it depends a lot on local authorities. If local authorities do something, people are also motivated. When they were renovating staircase recently, people started helping. However, people get discouraged if authorities do not care. They must show that they care about our district, teachers and priests also play an important role” (PL/U/Ex/04).

What is more, the respondents hope that additional institutions may change the situation. These institutions do not give money one, but help to find a way out of a crisis: „I think that various organizations such as PAL, CIS and KIS will become more popular and people will realize that going to KIS, CIS, PAL is as natural as going to Social Welfare Centre” (PL/U/Ex/03).

Public institutions of social welfare play the most important role in strategies of dealing with problems. Despite the fact that these institutions are not assessed positively, there are not too many other aid institutions, for example, non-governmental. As a result, the basis of resilient strategies are still public institutions. Our respondents usually assess charity organizations positively, for example, Caritas, Szlachetna Paczka etc. Nevertheless, they rarely involve in charity actions. However, a few of our respondents felt the need to „repay” help they got from charity organizations.

Non-governmental sector helps respondents affected by problems of disability. It satisfies needs of not only disabled people, but also other members of the family. In such cases, they provide not only financial support, but also psychological support: „Yes, a Foundation »Zdążyć z pomocą« helps us. We would have to pay about PLN 14 000–15 000 for a four-week holiday for Weronika, however, we chose cheaper ones. Although my husband earns a lot, we had to save some money. We club together fifty-fifty. When we don't have money, they pay for everything. They always help us when we are in need. I'm sure that I will have to ask my parents for money because the car will not cost PLN 200–300, but PLN 1000” (PL/R/11).

Non-governmental activity is focused also in places where local government supports the activity of inhabitants and knows their needs: „I know one case when family has improved their situation. Their financial situation is also better now. Aid they received provided them with impetus to change their life. This family does not receive benefits anymore” (PL/U/Ex/03).

„Local authorities realized a project »Zmieniamy podwórka« recently. There were social consultations and we discussed what should be done to make courtyards more friendly for parents and their children” (PL/U/Ex/03).

There are not too many organizations dealing with social welfare and social services in Poland, which has an impact of examined communities. Non-governmental organizations need active citizens. Such citizens must also see the value in common activities and have common goals they want to achieve. Strength of particular organizations is an ability to combine individual needs and interests.

Resilient practices of aid instructions are usually of passive nature: financial help, aids, benefits. Activating activities are rare, usually connected with activity of local government. There are not too many grass-roots initiatives, they are not in opposition to the state, but rather supplement it. They are not of community nature, they are rather initiatives of particularly active individuals. The weakness of non-public sector results also from financial dependence on public funds: in Poland, main source of money for this sector is cooperation with local governments, which order tasks for non-governmental organizations or give them subsidies.

## *Conclusions*

System of help and support is an important element of resilient practices, based mainly on public institutions. Local government is both local and state — apart from its own tasks, it has to realize tasks ordered by government administration. Non-public institutions and initiatives are not well-developed and usually cooperate with public institutions, they are often financially dependent on them.

The way of functioning of aid system depends on social sensitivity of local authorities. The situation is completely different in two similar urban spaces with similar problems due to the significance that local policy-makers attach to the issue of dealing with social problems.

There are also differences in resilient practices between city and village: institutionalized (also social) forms of aid play bigger role in urban areas, including activating role. There are less forms of institutional support in rural areas, and existing institutions are less effective. Informal, non-institutionalized support of family and neighbours is more visible in one of the rural areas, populated mainly by Silesian people. Whereas, in the second rural area, dominated by the incoming population, in which frequent resilient practice is private enterprise, help of family and neighbours is not frequent. However, it must be added that there are differences in rural areas resulting from attitudes of local authorities.

Activity of aid institutions often cause tensions (not conflicts) because people who try to manage on their own feel treated unfairly by the system, which supports mainly passive people having demanding attitude. In this context, we may say about destabilizing (with reference to social coherence) impact of aid institutions.

Due to selectiveness of public aid system and weakness of voluntary sector, which also plays more and more important role in this system, it may be said that the way of functioning of welfare state in examined communities is similar to residual model, however, it seems that it is not an effect of conscious strategy. Some steps were taken to gradually limit the scope of public social welfare in favour of private sector and informal systems of support, however, it mainly results from the need to limit the costs of the system because social welfare is still treated in Poland as a cost, expense, and not investment in people. On the other hand, clear re-centralized tendencies have emerged, especially in the issue of deciding about financial resources. There are attempts made to limit protective activities in favour of activation, including combining access to benefits with professional activation, however, there is not enough money to realize such strategy. Even considerable inflow of financial resources — thanks to the EU funds — only slightly improved the situation.

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## *Annex: Short description of the RESCuE project fieldwork conducted by Polish team<sup>4</sup>*

### *Description of local contexts*

In Polish case, the RESCuE project fieldwork was conducted in four communities (not two as in case of other national teams) — two urban and two rural. One urban and one rural in communities where Silesian dialect, traditions and culture, were openly manifested by inhabitants and one urban and one rural communities in Dąbrowa Basin (Zagłębie Dąbrowskie) part of Silesian Voivodeship, where this kinds of identity was not present.

### *Urban case*

**Urban case 1** — a district of County town with population more then 5700 inhabitants located in Dąbrowa Basin. The district was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the local mine as an umbrella settlement (flats were delivered to employees of the mine). An industrial plant was operating within these areas until 1994. The plant's closure was a consequence of economic transition process in democratizing country. The majority of contemporaneous inhabitants of the district have lost their job and the district itself has changed due to social decomposition: the mining community has disintegrated, some people have emigrated (or moved to another part of Poland to find work there) in search of better earnings.

Currently, the district is inhabited by over 5000 people. Half of them are indigenous people, the other half are members of immigrant community (who looked for a job in the mine which was operating in the 1970s and 1980s) and people looking for affordable flats after the economic collapse of the region. More than 25% of the population are retired miners whose professional life was associated with the mine. The new class order of the district was determined based on the levels of so-called resourcefulness and ability to function in the capitalist labour market of its residents.

**Urban case 2** — the district is one of five districts of the town situated in Upper Silesian Region It is located relatively close to the Drogowa Trasa Średnicowa bypass, so that it is well connected with other towns belonging to GOP (Upper Silesian Industrial Region). The district was founded at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was correlated with industrial development of the town. Its growth was mainly stimulated by a large industrial plant — Silesia. Its restructuring (as well as of other industrial plants in the region) resulted in pauperization of the formerly prosperous neighbourhood. In the current media discourse, the district has become a synonym for Silesian poverty ghetto. A large part of the population is struggling with unemployment and poverty, many of its residents are under the care of social welfare centre.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on Polish Work Package 3 Report: *Fieldwork Report — Place and Sampling* by Kazimiera Wódz and Monika Gnieciak with the help of: Barbara Slania, Maciej Klimek, Witold Mandrysz, Monika Szpoczek, Sabina Pawlas-Czyż, Zofia Trzeszkowska.

*Rural case*

**Rural case 1** — the village in the southern part of the Silesian Voivodship. It serves as the seat of the Municipality Office (the area of the commune: 5700 ha, population: almost 10 000 inhabitants). In addition to the Municipality Office, there is also Social Welfare Centre in the village centre as well as other major institutions associated with the life of the Municipality (the Civil Status Office, a fire station of Voluntary Fire Brigades, a church, a school, a day care centre). The village is partially located within the Landscape Park (a forest complex, ponds, rare species of birds).

Communities inhabiting the villages of the Municipality can be described as a “typical” Municipality for post-industrial Silesian areas of a rural nature of housing (single-family houses, sometimes surrounded by gardens and small orchards, built along the main street and a few side roads, among the more or less developed agricultural areas and forests) with the majority of population not maintaining itself from agriculture. The main source of income are work in industry or services performed in the nearby towns.

Within the territory of the Municipality operate, inter alia, eight People’s Sports Clubs, Association — Local Action Group, five Roman-Catholic parishes, a network of day care centres, Farmer’s Wives Associations and machinery rings.

**Rural case 2** is a village located in the Silesian Voivodship, in Dąbrowa Basin. The village is inhabited by almost 2000 people. A Voluntary Fire Brigade, Farmer’s Wives Associations and sports club operate here.

The Municipality is an example of “post-industrial village”: for many years arable farming was combined here with the professions of a miner or a steelworker. Mining made decisive contribution to the industrial face of this area. Nowadays, after coal mine closures, the extractive industry is represented only by Górnice Zakłady Dolomitowe seated in Siewierz and the basic sector of the county economy is energy sector (Elektrownia Łagisza and Elektrociepłownia Będzin). An important role is played also by metallurgy of non-ferruginous metals (Huta Będzin). This is complemented by small-scale production, craft and services. The total number of registered economic entities in the county is nearly 12 000. Farming serves as a complement to other sectors of economy in the county, although it covers more than 4000 farms.

The greater part of population are pensioners and disability pensioners, the remaining people work in the surrounding towns, at the airport — there is also a group of miners who, after the closure of the nearby mines, were transferred to the Silesian plants. Agriculture is no longer common in the traditional sense — people rather lease the land or try to figure out how to develop the area.

*Field access and contacting*

In all areas of research there was a problem of getting closer to the respondents (the exception was urban case 2 — see below). The first and most important reason was the aversion of the respondents to the talks about their difficult life/financial situation. Studies have revealed that in a society where for decades, talking about human values

is determined by the neoliberal discourse “you mean as much as you have”, the barrier of shame and mistrust make the conversation and contact with the respondents difficult (even in the study of poverty / crisis in terms of “coping”). It was also found that also the representatives of all types of social welfare institutions were less effective in gaining the confidence of the respondents than the activists, charities and NGOs representatives or respected representatives of local authorities (village leaders, councillors).

On the examined area failed the attempt of “matching a snowball”: respondents refused to talk about other people who are in the same difficult situation or pretended not to know anything about them (neighbours or friends).

In urban case 2, where for years the researchers of the RESCuE project worked with the local Municipality and enjoyed their trust, getting to the respondents was not a problem.

### *Sampling criteria and methods*

The common project criteria adopted in selecting the research sample for narrative interviews was generally understood dealing despite vividly difficult circumstances.

The Polish research on strategies for coping with poverty distinguishes three types of action: **active**, **passive** and **emergency**. **Active** strategies focus on finding new sources of income and multiplying the capital held, rather, without having to resort to minimize the needs and aspirations of family members. The **passive** strategies already consist in a significant minimizing needs. Passive behaviours include: the use of previously accumulated savings, borrowings, the use of the help of family and friends, reducing expenses, production-consumption based actions. Emergency strategies are a special type of passive actions and are based on the selling of pre-gathered goods and using institutional benefits of social assistance (benefits, care, supervision).

The RESCuE studies have focused more on the first two categories of activities that define a person actually “coping”. Difficult life situation is classified by: **poverty, unemployment, debt, disability, chronic illness, families with many children, lonely old age, single motherhood** etc.

We were looking for people of both sexes — it was pointed out that often and more willingly talking category are women, delegated by potential husbands/partners to talk with the researcher as the ones that know how to cope and how to talk about it with a stranger.

### *Conducting interviews*

#### *Narrative interview*

The interviews were carried out according to the method of biographical narrative interview, the method of asking questions was adapted to the course of the expression of the respondent and their erudition. Statements were, as far as possible, not interrupted, dispositions were treated as guidance and encouragement for further discussion and to ask questions to develop the statement of the respondent.

### *Photographic interviews*

After first round of interviews four households interviewed in every Case were selected for a second time for a more in-depth data collection with the help of visual methods, due to the significance of their household biography for the RESCuE questions. The household members have been asked to take photographs of their everyday situations, inspired and focused by open guiding questions. Photographs were taken by the interviewee in the time between the first and the second interview, with a simple digital camera or simple camera-enabled mobile phone given to the interviewee as an incentive for participation. This allowed the second interview to visually reflect on how the crisis is affecting their home and people with whom they live as well as on practices of resilience. The photos taken, at case level, served as a stimulus for generating narratives<sup>5</sup>.

In rural communities 20 interviews were completed, including 8 secondary (photographic). Also in urban communities, 20 interviews were conducted, including eight photographic ones.

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#### *Streszczenie*

Przedmiotem analizy są sposoby radzenia sobie gospodarstw domowych z trudnymi sytuacjami życiowymi widziane oczyma respondentów biorących udział w projekcie RESCuE. W artykule pokazano, jak postrzegają oni rolę różnych instytucji państwa opiekuńczego w strategiach zaradczych przyjmowanych przez różne osoby czy rodziny, w tym przez nich samych, w sytuacjach kryzysowych. Przedstawiono również, jak respondenci oceniają efekty działań podejmowanych przez pomoc społeczną i inne agendy państwa opiekuńczego. System pomocy społecznej stanowi ważny element praktyk zaradczych w badanych obszarach. Oparty jest przede wszystkim na instytucjach publicznych, które jednak są postrzegane jako nieefektywne i nieudolne, a ich działania jako prowadzące często do różnych niepożądanych zjawisk, w tym do bierności i uzależnienia od pomocy państwa.

**Słowa kluczowe:** strategie zaradcze, pomoc społeczna, państwo opiekuńcze

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<sup>5</sup> See: RESCuE Grant Agreement, part B: Description of Work Package 3 *Project Methodology and Fieldwork*.