



POVERTY WATCH 2023

Monitoring of poverty and anti-
poverty policy in Poland 2022-
2023

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Summary

2022. EXTREME POVERTY AMONG CHILDREN AND SENIORS INCREASES. PESSIMISTIC SCENARIO FOR 2023

- In 2022, extreme poverty remained at 4.7 per cent (Statistics Poland changed methodology based on the census). The extent of relative poverty decreased slightly (from 12.2 to 11.8 per cent).
- The number of Poles living in extreme poverty is still huge - 1.8 million, and more than 4.5 million were living in a situation of relative poverty.
- The number of children in extreme poverty increased by around 26 000 to 396 000 compared to 371 000 in 2021. (an increase from 5.3 to 5.7 per cent). If it were to be less than 1 per cent, which should be the government's target, this figure should be no higher than 69,000. To achieve this, the extent of extreme child poverty would have to decrease by as much as 83 per cent.
- The number of extremely poor seniors increased by around 14,000 - from 272,000 in 2021 to 287,000 in 2022 (an increase from 3.8 to 3.9 per cent).
- Hidden extreme poverty in Poland, i.e. homelessness of both Polish citizens and war refugees from Ukraine, could double in 2022. We do not have information on this as the government has abandoned nationwide homelessness surveys in 2021, 2022 and 2023.
- Energy poverty has been officially defined in Poland, but data on it are published with a long delay. For 2022, we know only one rate of inability to adequately heat a flat or house, rising from 3.2 per cent to 4.9 per cent which means 1.8 million people.
- Projections for 2023 are negative. The recorded percentage expressing fear of poverty in 2023 is the highest since 2015 and was as high as 30 per cent. Total poverty, extreme poverty of children, seniors and people with disabilities will increase mainly due to the difficult economic situation, high inflation, the lack of one-off protective allowances from 2022 and the lack of child benefits indexation.
- In 2024, poverty may stabilise due to an improving economy, reduced inflation, a still good labour market situation and an increase in universal child benefit (500+) by 200 PLN.

MATERIAL AND SOCIAL DEPRIVATION IN 2022: WORRYING INCREASE IN DEPRIVATION FOR CHILDREN AND SENIORS

- In 2022, the extent of severe material and social deprivation (a family cannot afford to meet at least 7 out of 13 needs) overall decreased by 30,000, to 851,000. This was 2.8 per cent of the Polish population. In contrast, the number of people in non-severe deprivation increased by 29,000 to 2.4 million.
- The number of children aged 0-17 years living in severe material and social deprivation decreased from 166 000 to 146 000. This was 2.3 per cent of children. This would perhaps be better information if it were not for the fact that the number of children in non-severe but still deprivation (at least 5 unmet needs out of 13) increased by 68,000 to 368,000 (5.4 per cent of children).
- The number of seniors aged 65+ in severe material and social deprivation increased by several thousand: from 189,000 to 208,000. This was 3.6 per cent of seniors. There were still 610,000 seniors in non-severe deprivation (an increase of almost 15,000 compared to 2021).

CASH BENEFITS IN 2023: ANOTHER YEAR WITHOUT CHILD BENEFIT INDEXATION

- In 2023, child benefit (500+), family allowances and most other family benefits were still frozen despite double-digit inflation, so their real value fell for another year. These are tacit and hidden cuts in family support, with the government saving on families more than PLN 31.4 billion between 2020 and 2023. Clear rules should be introduced for the annual indexation of all family benefits to avoid such situations in the future.

- In pension benefits, on the other hand, it was decided to introduce a second supplement to pensions, which in 2023 was exceptionally higher than in previous years and has already been introduced on a permanent basis. This solution, together with others for pensioners, however, leaves very poor older people on permanent social assistance benefits without support. The criteria and its maximum amount have not been increased in 2023 despite very high inflation.
- According to international standards, the basic unemployment benefit should be linked to the minimum wage, so that it cannot be lower than 50 per cent of this wage. In 2022 it was lower by PLN 200, in 2023 the difference increased to more than PLN 300.
- For poor people who are able to work and do not have the right to unemployment benefit (the majority of the unemployed), the only thing left from the guaranteed benefits is a periodical benefit from social assistance. The problem is that the guaranteed amount of this benefit is a maximum of PLN 388 for a household of one person without any income (50% of the difference between the income criterion and income). This is an amount lower than the extreme poverty line (PLN 835) by PLN 447. If this person still performed the maximum allowed 40 hours of socially useful work (intended for people on social assistance) with an official rate of PLN 10.90 (lower than the minimum hourly rate by PLN 13), he or she would still have a total income lower than the subsistence minimum i.e. extreme poverty line. This shows how stingy there is a guaranteed social assistance for this group of people.

WE HAVE A STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND OTHER STRATEGIES, PROGRAMMES AND PLANS, WE HAVE NO RESULTS

- The Government adopted the Social Services Development Strategy in June 2022. This document sets out goals and actions in the areas of family and foster care support services, the elderly, people with disabilities, people with mental disorders and in homelessness crisis. The main challenge will be its systematic implementation in the following years in partnership with NGOs, which will require the provision of significant financial resources.
- Good quality early care and education services (e.g. crèches) increase the chances of children from low-income families to do better at school and in adult life. Good quality crèches and nursery schools should therefore be viewed not only from the perspective of getting mothers into work, but also from the perspective of freedom from poverty in the future. Making these services more widespread and covering poorer families in particular should therefore be central to government programmes as well as local governments. The government should adopt the revised Barcelona targets - including at least 50 per cent of children under 3 in early care and education with an appropriate share of children from poor families by 2030.
- The low level of labour force participation of people with disabilities is striking compared to other countries, particularly the Nordic countries. This means that vocational rehabilitation and activation services are ineffective and that the whole system needs a thorough reform. The goal should be to increase the labour force participation rate of people with disabilities to at least 50 per cent.
- Social employment (professional and social reintegration and supported employment) and social cooperatives cover only a small percentage of the unemployed poor. The aim should be to generalise social economy entities in local government units. It is unclear how the new social enterprise status introduced by the Social Economy Act will contribute to this.
- People in crisis of homelessness who can still work should participate in programmes combining housing support and social employment. The priority in this area should be to move from support in shelters to supported housing. The experience of reforms carried out in Finland in this area should be used, e.g.

converting shelters into buildings with housing. The most vulnerable people in homelessness crisis should have access from programmes like Housing First, whose pilots ended in 2023.

- The supply of good quality care and assistance services in Poland is too low in relation to the needs of people with disabilities, including seniors. Many local governments do not provide them at all. The aim should be to disseminate and increase the supply of these services in local governments.
- Poor and homeless refugees in Poland require adequate support, which should be taken into account in integration programmes for refugees and migrants more broadly at central and local level.

The report was produced as part of the activities of the European Anti-Poverty Network. It brings together national networks from European countries and European civil society organisations that deal with social issues.

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Instead of an introduction: how we understand poverty

Poverty is then fully understood when one goes beyond its economic manifestations in the form of insufficient income, unmet needs or poor living conditions¹. For a full understanding, consideration of its non-economic effects in the form of negative impacts at the level of individuals, families and small communities, as well as entire societies, is required.

At the level close to the individual and family, poverty negatively affects:

- physical and mental health,
- marriage and relationships within marriages,
- parental behaviour towards children,
- children's functioning and future educational and occupational attainment, and family life,
- social activities outside the family, and on perceptions and treatment by the local community, employers and by local institutions (negative stereotypes, discriminatory behaviour).

In turn, at the level of whole societies, it can have negative economic and political effects. Through its negative impact at the micro level, poverty makes the economy grow less: people with health, family and social problems caused by poverty and their children have their careers interrupted, are less productive workers. For the same reasons, they may not go to the polls or vote for parties promising false solutions to their problems, negatively affecting democratic institutions.

To fully understand poverty, it is also necessary to consider its causes. These, too, are varied and occur at levels closer to the individual and the family and in whole societies. Facts such as old age, disability, illness, death in the family, childbirth, divorce, conflict with the law, growing up in a family without friends, with few material and cultural resources, but also discrimination in education, employment, inability to find a job, threaten to reduce income from work. Some of these risks are linked to the normal life cycle of the individual and the family, some are independent of them. At the level of whole communities and societies, there are causes such as natural disasters, epidemics, economic crises, riots and wars. In addition to causing disability, illness, death, refugees, inability to find work, they also directly destroy the material resources of individuals, families and whole communities.

EAPN proposes an understanding of poverty in which the economic, social and environmental policies of the EU, Member States and local governments can and should contribute directly and indirectly to preventing poverty and, when it does occur, to helping individuals, families and whole communities to break free from it.

This report provides an overview of data on poverty and material and social deprivation in general and poverty of children, seniors, families with persons with disabilities and workers. It also addresses the topic of hidden extreme poverty i.e. homelessness. We include refugee poverty, fuel poverty and hunger and malnutrition. We have also tried to give voice to people experiencing poverty and social workers in the section on multidimensional poverty, where the main thread in the material dimension is the cost of living crisis. The conclusions deal with anti-poverty policies from the perspective of the European Pillar of Social Rights with a distinction between income protection and social services.

¹ The EAPN's position on understanding poverty was presented in a publication: K. Duffy, *Czym jest ubóstwo i jak z nim walczyć? Informator EAPN*, 2020. <http://www.eapn.org.pl/eapn/uploads/2020/05/eapn-informator-ubostwo-pl.pdf>

Economic situation, household budgets and social policy in 2022 and the first half of 2023

Based on Eurostat data, we can conclude that Poland's economic growth in the last four quarters on a year-on-year basis shows a significant deterioration. In the third quarter of 2022, it was still 4.7 per cent, but in the second quarter of 2023, it reached a negative value of -1.3 per cent. This means that 2023 will be much worse than 2022 in this respect. The measure of GDP growth captures several variables, one of which is real individual consumption, i.e. private and public goods and services consumed by households. On an annual basis, this indicator has been negative in the last three quarters (-2.5 per cent in Q2 2023). It shows a worse situation compared to GDP growth.

The second very negative piece of information from this period was double-digit consumer price inflation. It amounted to 14.4 per cent on an annualised basis in 2022. In the first quarter of 2023, the inflation rate was 17 per cent compared to the same quarter of the previous year (the inflation rates of the third and fourth quarters of 2022 had similar values), and in the second quarter of this year it was 13.1 per cent.² The 5 percentage point drop in inflation means that prices are still rising rapidly, but at a slightly lower rate. It should be recalled that the inflation rate considered safe for the economy is 2.5 per cent. That is, actual inflation is still more than 5 times higher than the central bank's target.

It should also be noted that inflation in relation to food and energy prices has been significantly higher than inflation overall during this period. In March 2023, for example, food inflation was almost 10 percentage points higher than overall inflation. By contrast, in relation to the price of electricity, gas, solid fuels and heat, the highest difference was in September 2022, when it was almost 29 percentage points higher.³ It is these prices that are crucial for poorer households because of their basic needs for food and housing.

If unemployment were still rising rapidly, the picture would be unambiguously negative. However, this has not been the case. The registered unemployment rate has remained at just over 5 per cent over the last four quarters, and the unemployment rate from the Statistics Poland survey (LFS) has been less than 3 per cent over this period without much change. Unemployment thus did not increase regardless of how it was measured and it was at one of the lowest levels in decades.

The economic situation was therefore atypical: economic growth, real consumption and inflation are showing alarming levels, and unemployment is very low. From a social perspective, of course, it is better when we have rising consumption, low inflation and low unemployment, and worst when there is falling consumption, high inflation and rising unemployment. For working individuals and families, high inflation is not as threatening as it is for those who are unemployed or with intermittent employment. Income from work tends to be higher and more likely to increase than the income of those in unemployment. With low unemployment, it is also easier to find a job or change jobs.

Let us now turn to the income and expenditure situation of households. Let us first start with objective data from the household budget survey. **After adjusting for inflation, household income and expenditure declined in 2022: income fell by 5.3 per cent in real terms and expenditure by 2.3 per cent.⁴ For the poorest 20 per cent, the declines in real terms were much higher: incomes fell by as much as 10 per cent and expenditures by almost 5 per cent.** The results for 2023 will not be known until next year,

² Central Statistical Office (GUS) data.

³ Eurostat data.

⁴ The conclusion is based on our own calculations using Statistics Poland (GUS) data on nominal income and expenditure amounts and the 2022 price index. GUS reports that the average disposable income decreased in real terms by 2.6% (thus half as much), but expenditures increased in real terms by 0.7% instead of decreasing. *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych w 2022 r. w świetle badania budżetów gospodarstw domowych*, GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/warunki-zycia/dochody-wydatki-i-warunki-zycia-ludnosci/sytuacja-gospodarstw-domowych-w-2022-r-w-swietle-badania-budzetow-gospodarstw-domowych,3,22.html>

but surveys of the subjective assessment of one's own material situation are being conducted and we will turn to them now.

In March 2023, compared to April 2022, there was an increase from 14 per cent to 16 per cent of respondents who declared that they live modestly and have to be very frugal on a daily basis⁵. It is worth quoting the results of this research: **"In general, it can be seen that consecutively since 2020, the share of adult Poles who are concerned about poverty has increased, and the percentage expressing such concerns recorded this year [2023] is the highest since 2015"**.⁶ Those fearing poverty in 2023 were as high as 30 per cent.

In an opinion poll conducted in November 2022 75 per cent of respondents predicted that the number of people living in poverty would increase. In turn, among social assistance workers in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, more than half also had such concerns (survey completed in July 2022)⁷.

Given the above, we conclude that there were indications of fears of rising poverty in 2022 and 2023. However, the response of the public authorities to what was happening still needs to be taken into account. Already at the end of 2021, the first package of measures was enacted to curb inflation and shield households from its effects. In 2022, further packages of these measures were adopted. Some of them are also operational in 2023.

With regard to income support for households in 2022, there were firstly shield allowances with quite high income criteria. Then some allowances were implemented for all households that used different energy sources for heating their flats and houses (coal, wood, gas, electricity, etc.). It is clear that some of these households were poor or close to poverty to varying degrees. Hence, there were relatively higher amounts for their budgets, although expenses also increased due to price increases.

In 2022, the tax reform came into force, which, among other things, significantly increased the income tax-free amount. As a result, particularly lower pensions increased on net. This made up for the under-inflationary March indexation of pensions. In addition, two more one-off supplements to pensions were paid. As a result, pensioners' living standards were more strongly protected compared to the situation without the tax reform and without the supplements. Relative to families with children, pensioners have benefited more from the changes to the tax and benefit system in recent years.⁸

And what about the situation of families with children? **The government has not decided to increase the criteria and amounts of family benefits for poor families in 2021 (the year of the mandatory review), nor has it increased the universal child benefit (500+)⁹. This is therefore a tacit (hidden) cut in spending on these benefits, with a nominal cost to families of PLN 31.4 billion from 2020. This is the scale of the cuts in this area. In addition, the aforementioned tax reform meant that wealthier families gained PLN 1,000 per month from it, while poorer families lost PLN 550.**¹⁰

⁵ *Oceny sytuacji finansowej gospodarstw domowych*, CBOS, kwiecień 2023, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2023/K_049_23.PDF

⁶ *Ibidem*, s. 4.

⁷ S. Kalinowski, A. Łuczak i in. *Diagnoza do opracowania Programu Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu Województwa Mazowieckiego na lata 2023-2026*, Mazowieckie Centrum Polityki Społecznej, 2022, https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/22235/Diagnoza_ubostwo.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁸ M. Myck i in., *Druga kadencja rządów Zjednoczonej Prawicy: kto zyskał, a kto stracił?* CenEA 2023, https://cenea.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/komentarzprzedwyborzycenea2023_drugakadencja.pdf

⁹ Among family benefits, an exception is the caregiving allowance for caregivers who resign from work, which is indexed annually based on the minimum wage level.

¹⁰ M. Myck i in., *Druga kadencja rządów Zjednoczonej Prawicy: wsparcie rodzin z dziećmi w czasach wysokiej inflacji*, CenEA, 2023 https://cenea.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/komentarzprzedwyborzycenea2023_wsparcierodzin.pdf.

It is also necessary to take into account factors that may have reduced poverty in this group, which were not taken into account in the CenEA's analyses of the balance of tax and benefit reforms (shield allowances and others, VAT reductions, energy tariff freezes). Firstly, the support instruments mentioned above also reached families with children not only when they met the conditions for shield allowances and similar, but also when they were multi-generational families with an older generation in retirement or with people receiving disability pensions (including family pensions). Secondly, the good labour market situation meant that families could also benefit. Thirdly, new benefits for families were introduced in 2022, namely the family care capital and the nursery school subsidy. Even if they only cover families with younger children, they may have had a negative impact on poverty in this limited extent.

The policy of freezing child benefits justifies concerns about an increase in poverty for families with children and thus children, as the main benefits in this area were rapidly losing value in relation to price and wage increases. Some poorer families were losing their entitlement to family benefits due to the non-indexation of income criteria. In turn, other factors may have held back the growth of poverty among families with children.

What remains to be considered are social assistance benefits, which are targeted at the poorest households. The government decided to raise the income criteria in 2021, when inflation was starting to rise faster. These criteria determine not only entitlement to benefits, but also their level on an top up to the criterion (in the case of periodic benefit, only 50 per cent of the difference is guaranteed). The increase amounts in force from the beginning of 2022 have proved too low to compensate for inflation of more than 14 per cent (food and energy prices have risen much more). The contribution of these benefits to poverty reduction is declining. This is because the criteria are too low, the increase in income from other sources causing them to be exceeded and the resulting benefit levels too low in relation to rising living costs. The criteria are so low that for only two types of single-person households were equal to or above the extreme poverty line (subsistence minimum).¹¹ **This situation demonstrates the complete failure of the principle of the triennial review of criteria. Some extremely poor families are not entitled to social assistance because their income is too high. Despite extreme poverty, they are excluded from guaranteed social assistance.** In the case of people with a certificate of incapacity for independent living, the situation is somewhat alleviated by the supplement benefit, which add up to the income from the permanent benefit. However, its level (PLN 500) was also frozen in the period under review.

In the next section, we will therefore see which factors prevailed. Was it the weakening of economic growth, the fall in real consumption, high inflation and the policy of freezing child benefits, or perhaps low unemployment, income support due to the rise in energy prices, the increase in the income tax-free amount, pension supplements and new family benefits. However, we only have poverty indicators for 2022, and some of these factors will have a greater impact in 2023, e.g. very low economic growth, reduced real individual consumption, another year of freezing child benefits, no income allowances for energy price rises.

Poverty in 2022

Below we will provide information on several types of broadly defined poverty, which are measured using data from two GUS surveys. The first is the Household Budget Survey (BBGD) according to the Polish methodology. These surveys provide data on extreme, relative and official (statutory) poverty and on the sphere of social exclusion (the sphere of so-called insufficiency, "niedostatek" in Polish) in

¹¹ In 2023, the extreme poverty threshold for all family types will be higher than the income criteria, which is happening for the first time in the history of these benefits..

terms of expenditure¹². In contrast, the Income and Living Conditions Surveys according to the EU methodology (EU-SILC) provide data on poverty risk (relative poverty in the income dimension) and material and social deprivation. In the former case, unfortunately, these are data with a two-year lag, i.e. data with a date of 2022 published in 2023 refer to 2021 (the questionnaire question refers to the year before the survey).

It should be stressed that none of these surveys include individuals or families residing in non-residential settings or in institutions such as homeless shelters, single mother's homes, foster care facilities, nursing homes, refugee centres etc. For example, the GUS provides data on extreme poverty, but does not include any homeless people in it, as it only examines the situation of households in dwellings (see section on homelessness). So we have the exclusion of the extremely poor from extreme poverty surveys.

The second key observation is that the GUS has changed the weights with which it recalculates the results in order to obtain a sample structure similar to that of the population. This is standard procedure following the 2021 census in Poland. The GUS recalculated the 2021 results using the new weights, which changed the poverty picture in 2021 (slightly higher overall than with the old weights) and the comparison with 2022. It is a pity that the data for 2019 and 2020 and 2022 were not recalculated as well.¹³

Let us start the data presentation with the main indicator, which in the EU is used to set a target and measure progress in reducing poverty and social exclusion (AROPE). It is a composite indicator, consisting of three measures: relative income poverty (the cut-off is 60 per cent of median income), severe material and social deprivation (at least 7 unmet needs out of 13) and very low household work intensity. **The Polish target in this regard is to reduce the total number of people in this situation by 1.5 million by 2030, down from 6.6 million in 2019. A target for children in poverty or social exclusion was also adopted - a reduction of 300,000 from 1.1 million in 2019 (see next section).**

In 2022, the rate for the total decreased from 16.8 per cent to 15.9 per cent, representing approximately 5.9 million people. Compared to 2019, the number decreased by 702,000, which was already 47 per cent of the 2030 target to be achieved.

In 2022, this figure decreased from 16.8 per cent to 15.9 per cent, representing around 5.9 million people. Compared to 2021, the number decreased by 423,000, which represented 28 per cent of the target to be achieved. Material and social deprivation severe and non-severe (at least 5 unmet needs out of 13) remained at similar levels to 2021 - severe: 2.8 per cent (851,000 people), non-severe 6.4 per cent (2.4 million people). There was, however, a slight decrease in relative income poverty from 14.8 per cent to 13.7 per cent (about 5 million people) and, to a lesser extent, very low work intensity - from 4.2 per cent to 3.8 per cent. **Let us remember, however, that only the deprivation indicator relates to 2022 and the others to 2021.** We will therefore continue to focus our attention on the indicators of severe and non-severe material and social deprivation.

The measurement of poverty in the Polish methodology is based on the following principles:

¹² *Zasięg ubóstwa ekonomicznego w Polsce w 2022 roku*, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/warunki-zycia/ubostwo-pomoc-spoeczna/zasięg-ubostwa-ekonomicznego-w-polsce-w-2022-roku,14,10.html>

¹³ It is not clear whether the Central Statistical Office (GUS) also recalculated the data from the EU-SILC survey in this way, which is available through the Eurostat portal.

- 1) when the household expenditure per person¹⁴ are lower than the minimum subsistence level (PLN 835 per person living alone in 2022), this is extreme poverty,
- 2) when expenditure is less than 50 per cent of the average expenditure per person (PLN 1006 when living alone) this is relative poverty.

The GUS uses another threshold, which it refers to the sphere of insufficiency (the name used in this report: the sphere of social exclusion). This is the social minimum, which in the last quarter of 2022 was PLN 1554 or PLN 1581 for a one-person household depending on its type.¹⁵

A comparison of poverty lines for the two household types in recent years is included in Table 1.

Table 1. Extreme and relative poverty lines 2019-2022 for a one-person household and a family of two adults with two children (in PLN)

Threshold	2020		2021		2022	
	GD1	GD2+2	GD1	GD2+2	GD1	GD2+2
Absolute	640	1728	692	1868,4	835	2254
Relative	799	2157,3	909	2454,3	1006	2717

Source: own elaboration

The large increase in the extreme poverty line in 2022 was due to high inflation in that year. However, we can also see a fairly large increase in the relative poverty line, which means that nominally the average expenditure of families also increased (the limit is 50 per cent of this expenditure). The sphere of social exclusion threshold also increased significantly and was more than PLN 500 higher than the relative poverty line and almost twice as high as the extreme poverty line.

In 2022, extreme poverty remained at the same level as in 2021. (after recalculating with the new weights). In both years, it was 4.7 per cent, representing 1.8 million people. Recall that living in extreme poverty for more than 2 months endangers physical health.

Relative poverty decreased slightly from 12.2 per cent to 11.8 per cent, with 4.5 million people in this situation in 2022.

The sphere of social exclusion has decreased to a greater extent - from 42.4 per cent to 40.7 per cent. In absolute numbers, however, this is still a huge number of 15.4 million people.

Together with the information on material and social deprivation, we can therefore conclude that, in 2022, the overall situation has not changed for alarm indicators such as extreme poverty and severe material deprivation and has improved slightly for indicators of relative poverty and the sphere of social exclusion. **The lack of change in the situation of the poorest should be very worrying, given the obvious objective of completely eliminating extreme poverty and material and social deprivation in society.**

The picture obtained above applies to the situation for society as a whole. However, there are groups that should be protected more than others from poverty: children, people with disabilities and the elderly. In the following sections, the change in the situation in 2022 for these groups will be presented. In addition to these, we will also consider in-work poverty, a group that is supposed to be immune to

¹⁴ After applying the equivalence scale with weights: 1 for the first adult, 0.7 for the next adult, and 0.5 for children. In Eurostat surveys, the weights used are: 1, 0.5, and 0.3 respectively..

¹⁵ Subsistence Minimum and Social Minimum are estimated by Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych: https://www.ipiss.com.pl/aktualnosci_stale/min%C2%ADi%C2%ADmum-soc%C2%ADjal%C2%ADne-i-min%C2%ADi%C2%ADmum-egzystencji

poverty by design. In the following sections, we will present hidden extreme poverty, i.e. homelessness and the poverty of refugees from Ukraine, energy poverty and hunger and malnutrition.

Child poverty

One of the government's policy objectives for the child-rearing benefit (500+) was to reduce poverty among families with children, although no level was set that was to be achieved within a specific period of time. Such a target was not even set in the National Action Plan for the implementation of Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 on the establishment of a European guarantee for children¹⁶. Although the annex to this document contains several indicators with targets, there are no indicators of poverty or material and social deprivation among them. Only the number of children experiencing homelessness is directly related to poverty. **The target would be to reduce their number from a maximum of 992 in 2019 to 843 in 2030 (the Plan sets the maximum reduction at 15 per cent). This is a very unambitious target.**

In the context of the implementation plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights, Poland has adopted a target to reduce the number of children in poverty or social exclusion by 300,000 by 2030 compared to 2019.¹⁷ In 2022, this figure increased slightly from 16.5 per cent in 2021 to 16.7 per cent, representing 1.1 million children. **Compared to 2019, this figure has increased by 40,000. The situation for children is therefore, at the very least, not improving when other age groups are experiencing a more marked improvement. As we have seen above, the rate for the total population has decreased significantly in this period and almost half of the target (702,000 out of 1.5 million) has been reached. In the case of children, here we have stagnation at best, which should not be the case.**

The information in this section is also based on household budget surveys, so it does not refer to children who are homeless, in foster care or in residential care. The data refers to children in families, so their poverty is determined by the poverty of the families in which they live. There are fewer and fewer families with many children in Poland, but this does not mean that the number of children in these families is small. Let us take a hypothetical example: out of 100 families, we have 90 with one child, nine families with three children and one family with ten children. Families with many children thus account for one tenth, but raise almost 30 per cent of children.

In 2022, extreme child poverty was unfortunately not below 1 per cent, i.e. below 69,000 (which should be the government's target), but increased from 5.3 per cent to 5.7 per cent, reaching 396,000. Almost 400,000 children were thus living in extremely poor families.

Relative child poverty was at a similar level to 2021, at 14.1 per cent, which already accounted for 980,000 children.

As for the sphere of exclusion, the situation has improved. The percentage of children in this situation decreased from 47.1 per cent to 45.8 per cent. However, this still represented a huge number of children - around 3.2 million.

Children's material and social deprivation increased from 4.3 per cent to 5.3 per cent, representing 368,000 children. An increase of almost 68,000 children compared to 2021. Severe deprivation, on the other hand, decreased slightly - from 2.5 per cent to 2.3 per cent of children, it means that 146,000 were living in families with very severe problems in meeting material needs.

In summary, the lack of a significant reduction in the extreme poverty rate among children is worrying, and the increase in material and social deprivation among this group should raise legitimate concerns about what will happen in 2023.

¹⁶ Child Guarantee: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=pl>

¹⁷ Social Protection Committee. Annual Report 2023, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13306-2023-ADD-1/en/pdf>

Elderly poverty

As in the case of children, for seniors the government has not set targets for indicators of poverty or material and social deprivation in the 2018 Social Policy for Older People 2030 strategy document. The situation of older people aged 65 and over and the oldest old is related to limitations in their ability due to age, social stereotypes and the various regulations that affect them. This is a group covered by universal pension benefits, which should protect them from poverty. Firstly, not all older people are entitled to pensions. Secondly, some of these benefits may be very low, which is especially true for pensions below the statutory minimum pension.

Extreme poverty among seniors increased slightly in 2022. - a change from 3.8 to 3.9 per cent, which represented around 287,000 people. Extreme poverty is therefore slightly less extensive among the elderly than among children.

Relative poverty among seniors was unchanged at 9.8 per cent in 2022, representing around 721,000 people. A figure more than twice as high as extreme poverty.

The sphere of exclusion, on the other hand, decreased somewhat more markedly, from 37.7 per cent to 36.2 per cent. This means around 2.7 million older people in this situation.

Material and social deprivation for this group remained at 2021 levels at 8.3 per cent. This represented 610,000 people. Severe deprivation affected 3.6 per cent of seniors, up slightly from 3.2 per cent. The number of people in such a situation was 208,000. **Thus, while extreme poverty is lower among seniors than among children, material deprivation is already more extensive among seniors.**

In summary, the poverty of seniors in the broadest sense of the term did not show any improvement in 2022, apart from the social exclusion indicator, where there was a slight improvement. The lack of improvement in the extreme poverty of seniors should raise concerns about the situation in 2023.

Poverty among people with disabilities

People with disabilities, including children and people of working age, are also more likely to be in poverty. In the case of children, this is due to their greater care needs. As for adults, they have limited access to education and the labour market.

This time, the government has not forgotten to set a poverty reduction target. In the document 'Strategy for People with Disabilities 2021-2030', it adopted that the extreme poverty rate of households with people with disabilities is to be reduced to 5 per cent by 2030.

It should be noted that the Polish methodology does not refer to people with disabilities, but to their families (households). It is therefore not a person-centred approach. We do not have data on poverty exclusively for these people. We only have data for families with at least one such person, and this includes the head of household with a disability and at least one child under 16 with a disability certificate.

Extreme poverty in households with at least one person with a disability decreased from 7.2 per cent to 6.7 per cent. This is mainly due to a decrease in poverty in households with a person labelled as the head of household with a disability - a decrease from 7.6 per cent to 4.9 per cent. **For households with children with a certified disability, extreme poverty increased markedly from 5.2 per cent to 6.5 per cent.**

Relative poverty in families with at least one person with a disability decreased from 18.1 per cent to 16.2 per cent. This time, the decrease occurred in both subtypes of families and is of greater magnitude:

from 20.4 per cent to 15.5 per cent in families with a head with a disability; from 15.5 per cent to 12 per cent in families with at least one child with a disability. Only if there was a decrease in extreme and relative poverty simultaneously in these families could this be considered an unambiguous change in a positive direction.

For people with disabilities, we have an indicator of severe material deprivation from the EU-SILC survey. In Poland, **deprivation increased from 9.7 per cent to 10.7 per cent in 2022 for people with severe activity limitations aged 16-64. In comparison, deprivation decreased from 2.2 per cent to 1.8 per cent for those with no activity limitations in this age range.**

The increase in extreme poverty for families with children with disabilities and the increase in material and social deprivation for people with severe activity limitations is therefore of concern.

In-work poverty

As in previous years, we also present in-work poverty. This is the group that is considered to be least at risk of poverty due to the belief that work is effective in protecting against it. However, this takes into account neither the fact that wages can be very low, e.g. civil law contracts, part-time employment, nor the fact that those in work have other dependents. In the latter case, even a wage higher than the minimum wage may not be sufficient to meet the needs of the whole family at an adequate level. Obviously, living solely on unearned sources (other than work, pensions and other benefits) significantly increases the risk of poverty.

The GUS surveys do not take into account working people as such, but families living mainly from work. Poverty in such families therefore includes all persons, not just workers.

Extreme poverty in families living mainly from work increased slightly from 4.3 per cent to 4.5 per cent. In relation to people in households where everyone is working, this accounted for around 528,000 people.

In contrast, relative poverty in these households saw a slight decrease from 11.6 per cent to 11.5 per cent in 2022. This represented approximately 1.4 million people in such households.

The sphere of exclusion decreased more markedly in these households, with a drop from 42.1 per cent to 40.9 per cent. However, this was still around 4.8 million people.

Surveys according to the European Union methodology already take into account in-work poverty, not just that of households. However, when it comes to relative poverty in terms of income, the indicators are for 2021. The same is true for household work intensity. This leaves the focus on material and social deprivation by labour market status. For the total working population aged 18 and over, the rate remained the same at 3.6 per cent. For workers in standard employment, it also remained the same at 3.7 per cent. It declined slightly for the rest of the working population, from 3.3 per cent to 3.2 per cent.

In summary, in-work poverty neither worsened nor improved in 2022. The exception was a decrease in the percentage of people in households living mainly from work income and in the sphere of social exclusion.

The basic data cited above are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic data on poverty in Poland in 2022.

	Extreme poverty		Relative poverty		Social exclusion sphere		Severe material and social deprivation	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
Total	4,7	1,8 mln	11,8	4,5 mln	40,7	15,4 mln	2,8	851 tys.
Children 0-17	5,7	396 tys.	14,1	980 tys.	45,8	3,2 mln	2,4	146 tys.
Elderly 65+	3,9	287 tys.	9,8	720 tys.	36,2	2,7 mln	3,6	208 tys.
GD with OzN	6,7		16,2		47,9		10,7*	
GD without OzN	4,3		11		39,3		1,8*	
GD working income	4,5	528 tys.	11,5	1,35 mln	40,9	4,8 mln	1,5**	
GD non-working income	12,3		27,9		64,5		17,8**	

* Severe material deprivation, persons with severe activity restrictions

** Severe material deprivation of employed population, sum of severe material deprivation of unemployed and non-working (age 18-59)

GD – households, OzN – persons with disabilities

Source: GUS, Eurostat, own calculations

Hidden extreme poverty: homelessness

Homelessness is one extreme manifestation of housing problems. There are, of course, more than just homelessness. A nationwide study commissioned by Habitat for Humanity found that 21 per cent of respondents indicated as a problem the inability to renovate their apartment/home, 19 per cent indicated problems with inadequate heating, 18 per cent declared the inability to replace their flat with a better, more suitable one, and 11 per cent indicated the inability to live independently in their own or rented flat¹⁸.

Inflation of prices related to the use of a flat or house in the months of January-August 2023, compared to the corresponding months of 2022, was still very high. Heating prices increased the most, up 39 per cent, electricity up 22 per cent, gas up 16 per cent, landlord fees up 14 per cent, and sewerage services and refuse collection up 8 and 9 per cent.¹⁹

In Poland, in 2022, 126,000 households were waiting for rental housing and temporary premises from the municipal housing stock, of which 40,000 households were waiting for social rent as part of the implementation of eviction judgements, and 16,500 for temporary premises.²⁰ A temporary accommodation does not have to be a flat, it can be a room of no less than 5 square metres.

Housing problems therefore have many manifestations affecting the condition of households and families in housing. We know a lot about them from surveys by the GUS and Eurostat.

The GUS publishes data on extreme poverty on the basis of household budget surveys. It does not directly report that these do not include people in non-residential settings or in institutions such as shelters for the homeless, single mothers' homes, social welfare homes or foster care facilities. This is due to the rules of these surveys, which have households in their name, and these are defined by living in a dwelling and living together. The EU-SILC surveys are of a similar nature, i.e. severe material and social deprivation does not include individuals or families outside the places defined as housing. So we have hidden extreme poverty, what do we know about it?

The last nationwide census-like survey on homeless people and their numbers was conducted in 2019 on the initiative of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. These surveys were conducted regularly every two years between 2011 and 2019 in early February and lasted for one day. They included both people in non-residential settings and people in various institutions for people in crisis of homelessness (e.g. night shelters, hostels, single mothers' homes). On the basis of these surveys and other information, the Ministry prepared reports on the implementation of measures for the homeless in the regions.

Why were these surveys not continued in 2021? The ministry explained it the pandemic situation. Why were the surveys not scheduled for 2022? If usually the census was conducted in the first half of February, the justification could not be the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the mass refugees that took place since 24 February. Why was the survey not scheduled for February 2023? This time, the excuse could have been the arrival of millions of refugees to Poland and the social assistance tasks involved, but thus we have no exact data on the increase in homelessness in Poland due to the new refugee homelessness. While much is already known about refugees from Ukraine in Poland, there is no information about those of them who are homeless because they are staying in non-residential

¹⁸ *Problemy mieszkaniowe osób mieszkających w Polsce oraz ocena istniejących rozwiązań – raport z badania opinii publicznej*, Habitat For Humanity, 2023, <https://habitat.pl/files/HfH%20-%20badanie%20opinii%20publicznej%20-%20problemy%20mieszkaniowe%20-%202023.pdf>

¹⁹ *Wskaźniki cen towarów i usług konsumpcyjnych w sierpniu 2023 roku*, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ceny-handel/wskazniki-cen/wskazniki-cen-towarow-i-uslug-konsumpcyjnych-w-sierpniu-2023-roku,2,142.html>

²⁰ *Gospodarka mieszkaniowa w 2022 roku*, GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/infrastruktura-komunalna-nieruchomosci/nieruchomosci-budynki-infrastruktura-komunalna/gospodarka-mieszkaniowa-w-2022-roku,14,6.html>

places, in places that do not meet the standards of homeless shelters (exhibition halls, sports halls, etc.) or institutions for the homeless. **A survey of representatives of non-governmental organisations supporting refugees and/or people in crisis of homelessness (N=47) found that "the main theme in the open-ended statements of respondents is the fear of a sharp increase in homelessness among refugees from Ukraine".**²¹

In 2021, there were 31,000 people in crisis of homelessness in various facilities (GSU data). There were up to 5,000 refugees from Ukraine in 2022 in just one PTAK Humanitarian Aid Centre near Nadarzyn (big hall not for residential proposes). **In surveys, 5 per cent of refugees declared that they were staying in centres for war refugees²², which in September 2023 would represent approximately 47,000 people. If these centres were like the Ptak halls, this would mean that there would be more homeless refugees than homeless Polish citizens in 2022 and 2023.**

Situations of being housed without secure tenant rights are referred to as housing exclusion. The rights of refugees, and mainly refugee women, who have stayed and continue to stay in private flats of Polish citizens on a lending basis are excluded from the Act on tenants' rights²³. Their situation is therefore very precarious and should be considered a form of housing exclusion. **In summary, the scale of homelessness and housing exclusion in Poland has dramatically increased in 2022 and this condition also continues in 2023.**

The Ministry has so far not announced that a census survey on the homelessness will be conducted in 2024. If it did not take place, it would be another year of a lack of nationwide information on people in crisis of homelessness and their basic characteristics (the nationwide survey used a simplified questionnaire of socio-demographic characteristics).

The only information we have on this subject nationally comes from social assistance reporting, summarised in the MRiPS-03 report and made available by the GUS in the Local Data Base. In 2022, shelter was granted to 23.3 thousand people, which was 1.7 thousand less than in 2021 (24.9 thousand). Data on people in various homeless facilities shows a 4% increase in 2022, (an increase of 1.3 thousand people). It appears, therefore, that in a year of massive influx of refugees, the data on shelter provided shows a decrease and the data on people in institutions only a slight increase. In comparison, the number of migrants receiving food aid increased by almost 1,700 per cent, or 17 times²⁴. This shows how social assistance reporting is not adapted to phenomena such as homelessness and housing exclusion related to mass arrival of refugees. This made it all the more justifiable to conduct a nationwide survey in 2023 and it is surprising that it has been abandoned.

It is worth adding that NGOs are trying to fill the gap and are preparing reports on groups whose homelessness is unnoticed (hidden). An example is the Po Drugie Foundation's reports on youth

²¹ J. Wilczek, *Uchodźcy – Mieszkania - Bezdomność*, Ogólnopolska Federacja na rzecz Rozwiązywania Problemu Bezdomności, 2023, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/121qgLyshN7rIJZFpp14KgVScKkyQTB2/view>

²² A. Górny, P. Kaczmarczyk, *Between Ukraine and Poland. Ukrainian migrants in Poland during the war*, Centre of Migration Research, luty 2023, <https://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Spotlight-FEBRUARY-2023.pdf>

²³ L. Markiewicz, *Mieszkanie dla uchodźcy. Czy użyczenie jest lepsze od najmu?*, <https://www.infor.pl/prawo/umowy/najem-i-dzierzawy/5459456,Mieszkanie-dla-uchodzcy-Czy-uzyczenie-jest-lepsze-od-najmu.html>

²⁴ Calculation based on: *Sprawozdanie roczne z wdrażania Programu Operacyjnego Pomoc Żywnościowa w 2022 r.*, Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/01e35fab-f75a-4637-a485-527df4612098>

homelessness²⁵ or the report by the National Federation for Solving the Problem of Homelessness on LGBT+ homelessness²⁶.

The lifting of the pandemic eviction ban and rising rents, the cost of electricity, gas, solid fuels and heat in flats and houses (the increase from January 2021 to July 2023 was more than 60 per cent) could generate increasing debts and, as a result, an increase in housing insecurity and homelessness.

Poverty among refugees from Ukraine

One of the main social events in Poland in 2022 was the mass arrival of refugees from Ukraine, mainly women with children. The problem of homelessness in this group was mentioned above, but the housing and income situation is obviously very different. There are no studies that measure the different types of poverty in this group. However, we do have some studies that characterise the occupational and income situation of this group more generally²⁷.

Analysis of employment among refugees in Poland revealed some distinctive differences compared to immigrants as a whole. Although industry, construction and transport are traditionally male-dominated industries, among refugees (mostly women) the share of those working in industry was only 19 per cent. In construction and transport, the share of refugees was also much lower. Refugee women were more likely to work in the hotel, catering and personal services sectors. Many also provided services directly to households. Compared to other migrants, a higher percentage of refugees worked in higher-skilled occupations such as health care, education or culture.

The economic situation was assessed by analysing what proportion of the income of immigrants and refugees is spent on living in Poland. If a smaller proportion of income is spent on current needs, this indicates a better income situation. For migrants who arrived in Poland before and after the outbreak of war, the situation is different.

- 36 per cent of migrants who arrived before February 2022 spend 50 per cent or less of their monthly income on current expenses in Poland. For refugees, this percentage is 28 per cent.
- The most common answer among economic migrants regarding spending is 70-80 per cent of income. The same answer is the second most popular among refugees.
- 19 per cent of pre-war migrants and 34 per cent of refugees spend 80-100 per cent of their current income on living in Poland.

The report showed that 20 per cent of refugees were in the worst financial situation, 'living from day to day', and this is a first approximation of the scale of poverty in this group. If we consider that 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine remained in Poland longer in the autumn of 2022, 300,000 were living in poverty, including some in extreme poverty in places that can be considered mass shelters for homeless refugees (the PTAK Humanitarian Centre is an example). If the situation were still similar (poverty scale of 20 per cent), then in September 2023, 192,000 refugees from Ukraine would be in such a situation (refugees with status from the special law were then 958,000 in Poland).

²⁵ *Dodaj mnie. Bezdomność młodzieży i młodych dorosłych w Polsce. Raport 2023*, Fundacja Po Drugie, : <https://podrugie.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/RAPORT-DODAJ-MNIE.pdf>

²⁶ E. Szadura-Urbańska, J. Wilczek, *Bezdomność osób LGBT+.* Raport z badań. Ogólnopolska Federacja na rzecz Rozwiązywania Problemów Bezdomności, 2023, https://bip.mcps.com.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/Raport_LGBT_2023_FINAL.pdf

²⁷ *Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna migrantów z Ukrainy w Polsce – wpływ pandemii i wojny na charakter migracji w Polsce. Raport z badania ankietowego*, NBP, 2023, https://nbp.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Sytuacja-zyciowa-i-ekonomiczna-migrantow-z-Ukrainy-w-Polsce_raport-z-badania-2022-r.pdf

Energy poverty

The previous points referred to general poverty in terms of expenditure and the number of unmet needs of different groups. In Poland, at the end of 2021, another type of poverty was officially defined, which takes into account both low income and high energy expenditure and the energy efficiency status of the building (Article 5gb of the Energy Law). In the traditional approach, it is enough for a household to have an income or expenditure below the poverty line and be considered as living in poverty. In the energy-focused approach, we also take into account expenditure on this category in relation to the limit of such expenditure (what energy expenditure is too high) and the condition of the building also in relation to a certain energy efficiency standard (what efficiency is too low).

Relative to the traditional approach, energy poverty captures both income and expenditure, but also the quality of the dwelling or house. It is therefore a multi-dimensional approach. It focuses on energy, whose importance for people's lives is crucial, hence access to energy is recognised as a fundamental right in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Lack of access to energy can exclude people from participating in society. Energy poverty has a direct negative impact on health, both physical and mental. It can lead to stress and social isolation, and people living in energy poverty often face serious health problems. These negative health effects lead to longer and more frequent sick leave, which affects employment. This also results in real economic consequences for society as a whole. This is why EPSU (European Public Service Union) and EAPN are calling for a universal right to energy, the practical manifestation of which should be a ban on disconnecting poor individuals and families from energy²⁸. In Poland, such a ban has been introduced since 2022, but it applies to vulnerable consumers, not to all poor people, and on top of that - only in the autumn and winter months.

Another advantage of the concept of energy poverty is that it combines social issues (poverty) with environmental issues such as energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

Data on fuel poverty measured in several ways is prepared by the GUS, but at the time of writing the report it was not yet available for 2022 apart from one indicator from Eurostat - **the inability to adequately heat a flat or house. This increased from 3.2 per cent to 4.9 per cent, representing 1.8 million people, and the increase itself was by as many as 637,000. So the situation has worsened considerably.**

In 2021, the rate of energy poverty according to the inclusion of low income and high costs was 10.5 per cent, and on the basis of high energy expenditure alone it was as high as 18.8 per cent.²⁹ These figures per number of people represent millions of Poles in energy poverty: from 3.86 million people living in 1.4 million households to 6.58 million people living in 2.3 million households³⁰.

We will complete the picture based on the March 2023 opinion poll. **A total of 34 per cent of respondents admitted that they had consciously not heated their home or flat in response to the increase in energy prices, with women (37 per cent) and residents of small and medium-sized towns (40 per cent) most affected**³¹.

²⁸ *Right to Energy for All Europeans!*, EPSU, EAPN, 2017,

<https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/Right%20to%20energy%20web%20reading%20-%20EN.pdf>

²⁹ *Zużycie energii w gospodarstwach domowych w 2021 r.*, GUS, https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5485/12/2/1/zuzycie_energii_w_gospodarstwach_domowych_w_2021_r.pdf

³⁰ P. Chrzanowski, J. Fabiszewska-Solarek, M. Ościłowski, *Ubóstwo energetyczne. Rola efektywności energetycznej w walce z ubóstwem energetycznym*, WISE, 2022,

<https://wise-europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/UBOSTWO-ENERGETYCZNE.pdf>

³¹ *Polska po zimie*, More in Common, <https://www.moreincommon.pl/co-robimy/polska-po-zimie/>

It is worth mentioning an interesting initiative by the Stocznia Foundation, which implemented a nationwide process that launched a democratic reflection on energy poverty. It consisted of local deliberations and the first nationwide citizens' panel³². EAPN Poland was one of many partners in this endeavour. The main idea was to involve ordinary citizens who were supported by experts in the process. The end result was dozens of energy, environmental and social policy proposals.

Energy poverty was discussed with the Stocznia Foundation, other organisations and people experiencing poverty. Several issues related to energy poverty were raised in the discussion³³.

- The risk of antagonising different social groups in the public debate on smog was highlighted. It was emphasised that the emissions of poor households are not their choice but a necessity.
- The lack of coherence of state energy policies was pointed out, creating uncertainty for citizens. Consistency in communication from the administration was called for.
- Examples of successful foreign information campaigns combining individual benefits and social objectives were cited.
- Attention was drawn to the increase in energy costs affecting social organisations and NGOs.
- The class dimension of existing programmes supporting thermo-modernisation, favouring the middle and upper classes, was pointed out.
- Controversy over the application of support criteria - whether it should be targeted at the poorest or be universal - was presented.

Hunger and malnutrition

Hunger and homelessness are the most obvious manifestations of unmet basic needs. What do we know about hunger and malnutrition in Poland? Research on this topic was conducted on behalf of the Federation of Food Banks between April and July 2023.³⁴ The report distinguishes between quantitative malnutrition (a deficiency in dietary calorie intake) and qualitative malnutrition, i.e. a deficiency in relevant micronutrients, proteins, vitamins and minerals. The second type of malnutrition is less recognised, but equally important due to its negative impact on health and life functioning.

Respondents to the survey were food aid recipients of food bank partner organisations. **In 2022, there were 1.4 million such people. A large proportion of partner organisations (38 per cent) acknowledged that the number of people applying for assistance had increased in the last year.** Another survey of organisations providing food aid (the survey was conducted in February-June 2022) showed that new recipients were mainly senior citizens over 65 (45 per cent of organisations indicated this), and there is also an increase in the number of people with disabilities and the unemployed (40 per cent of organisations). Some organisations also indicated an increase in interest from families with children (35 per cent) and refugees from Ukraine (3 per cent)³⁵.

However, the ministerial report on food aid for the whole of 2022 showed that the number of migrants among the recipients of this aid increased by almost 1700 per cent, which is as much as 17 times compared to 2021.

³² *Narada obywatelska o kosztach energii*, <https://stocznia.org.pl/projekty/narada-obywatelska-o-kosztach-energii/>

³³ *Stanowisko grupy partycypacyjnej „Ubóstwo energetyczne – wsparcie odbiorców wrażliwych i rekomendacje rozwiązań problemu”*, WRZOS, 2023, <https://www.wrzos.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ubostwo-energetyczne-sgp.pdf>

³⁴ M. Czapnik-Jurak, *Niedożywienie i głód w Polsce. Raport Banków Żywności*, Federacja Banków Żywności, 2023.

³⁵ *Raport końcowy. Ustrukturyzowane badanie odbiorców końcowych Programu Operacyjnego Pomoc Żywnościowa 2014-2020*, Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/a149482b-a095-4fdc-a4ee-38e18b661e73>

In the Federation of Food Banks study from 2023, **more than 77 per cent of surveyed households stated that their financial situation had deteriorated over the past year. Over 53 per cent of respondents admitted that their financial resources are not sufficient to meet basic needs. Meanwhile, about 45 per cent of respondents believe they can meet basic needs, but larger purchases require prior planning. Nearly 60 per cent admitted that they recently had to buy food with borrowed money. In response to high inflation, over 90 per cent of respondents changed their shopping habits. Among the products most often forgone were fish and their derivatives, meat and cold cuts, sugar and sweets, and vegetables and fruits.** Other strategies for coping with rising prices by food aid recipients were taking advantage of promotions and discounts and choosing cheaper stores and products.

Regarding experiencing hunger for financial reasons, 36 per cent of respondents said that they occasionally (56 per cent), once (26 per cent), or frequently (19 per cent) found themselves in such situations. When asked how many times a week respondents could afford to eat 3 meals a day, 32 per cent said they could do it at most 3 days a week, and 11 per cent said only once a week or less frequently than once a week.

The conclusions of the Federation's report highlighted three groups at risk of hunger and malnutrition in Poland: those qualifying for food aid who either do not receive it or do not apply for it; those receiving food aid but still experiencing (periodic) hunger and malnutrition; working poor and individuals receiving benefits (slightly exceeding the income threshold) whose income is not enough to cover current obligations.

Eurostat data indicates that **the inability to afford a meat, fish, or vegetarian equivalent meal every other day increased from 3.6 per cent to 4.1 per cent. The rise is very concerning among single parents, from 5.6 per cent to 8.9 per cent, and also among two-parent families with three or more children, from 2.8 per cent to 3.8 per cent.**

The situation in 2022 worsened, and in 2023 it will likely continue to deteriorate. If almost one-fifth of food aid recipients often feel hunger for financial reasons, one might ask if appropriate income support wouldn't prevent the need for food assistance in-kind?

Outlook for 2023 and 2024, taking into account the state of public finances

The economic situation of Poland in 2023, according to the forecasts of the European Commission, will be marked by very modest economic growth (0.5 per cent) and continued high inflation (13.1 per cent). In 2024, economic growth is expected to be higher (2.7 per cent), and inflation is projected to be half of the previous year's rate (6.1 per cent). The forecast took into account the increase in energy prices associated with the withdrawal of measures designed to curb these price increases in 2023. The projection also considered the rise in expenditures on monetary benefits (e.g., an increase in the child-rearing allowance to 800 PLN) and the minimum wage, but solely in the context of inflationary pressures.³⁶

The year 2023 is distinctive due to the parliamentary elections. Election years are not conducive to the government introducing unpopular cuts in various benefits due to fears of the electoral costs of such decisions. Signs of this are also clearly visible in Poland. The first example might be the permanently introduced of the second supplement to pensions and disability pensions (the 'fourteenth month' payment), which is higher than in previous years. The second example is the increase in the child-rearing

³⁶ *Economic forecast for Poland*, https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-surveillance-eu-economies/poland/economic-forecast-poland_en

allowance to 800 PLN, even though it is set to be implemented in the new year. The amount of the increase is slightly higher than what would result from the real value loss of this benefit in the years 2021-2023. It's important to remember that this decision came after many years of freezing benefit levels, which poorer families felt more acutely.³⁷

Due to the war triggered by Russia's attack on Ukraine, the government also significantly increased defence spending. Additional expenses were also tied to the decision to grant financial aid to female refugees with children from Ukraine. Some costs were also reimbursed to individuals and organisations providing accommodation, rooms, and flats.

The above information raises concerns about the state of public finances and fears of possible cuts in social benefits in the near future. These cuts may resemble those from 2021-2023, when increases in child benefits were withheld. If family benefits and child-rearing allowances remain at the same level after 2024, they will again lose value due to continued high inflation. How likely is the scenario of overt or covert cuts in the name of austerity?

Firstly, the decisions of major political parties towards an open policy of cuts are rather unlikely in the short term. If the currently ruling party wins the elections, then such cuts are off the table. Meanwhile, the main opposition party also does not suggest that, if they win the elections, they would make decisions about radical savings in public spending. As mentioned, this does not mean that the hidden cuts by no indexation of child benefits will not continue in the years after 2024.

Secondly, according to data from the European Commission, the deficit of the entire public finance sector in Poland was -3.7 per cent of GDP in 2022. The forecast for 2023 is -5 per cent, and for 2024, it's projected at -3.7 per cent. Public debt in these years is expected to be 49.1 per cent, 50.5 per cent, and 53 per cent respectively. One of the conditions for initiating the Excessive Deficit Procedure (a deficit higher than 3 per cent) under the Stability and Growth Pact has thus been met. After the suspension of this Pact from 2020-2023, it is set to be reinstated in 2024. There is a risk that the procedure will be reactivated with respect to Poland (it was previously in place in Poland from 2009-2015). If this happens, it will be a challenge for the next government. The procedure involves commitments to specific steps to improve the financial situation of the budget, meaning reducing the deficit and public debt. In simplified terms, reducing the deficit can be achieved by increasing tax revenues and/or reducing expenditures.

If the future government opts for the latter solution, one can fear that public spending will be reduced, and a significant portion of it consists of social spending. However, this is a scenario likely for 2025, not the coming year.

In summary, 2023 will be a difficult year due to low economic growth and still high inflation, as well as the absence of some income support measures due to rising energy prices (additional benefits introduced only in 2022). There is also an important fact that this will be another year of real depreciation for a large part of family and child benefits. On the other hand, the labour market situation will still be good; two minimum wage increases and minimum hourly rates at the beginning of the year, as well as the indexation of pensions and disability benefits in March 2023, have already accounted for higher inflation from 2022. Their real value will thus increase, not decrease as in 2022. Especially since inflation will likely continue to decrease in the second half of the year. Poverty may therefore remain at a similar

³⁷ M. Myck i in. *Druga kadencja rządów Zjednoczonej Prawicy: wsparcie rodzin z dziećmi w czasach wysokiej inflacji*, CenEA 2023. https://cenea.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/komentarzprzedwyborzycenea2023_wsparcierodzin.pdf.

level as in 2022. As for the material and social deprivation of families with children, we have already seen an increase in this indicator in 2022, and unfortunately, it may increase again in 2023.

The year 2024 might be better than 2023 due to higher economic growth and lower inflation, as forecasted by the European Commission. These forecasts also suggest that the good situation in the labour market will continue. Minimum wage increases, minimum hourly rates, and the March indexation of pensions and disability benefits will again be based on high inflation from 2023, which in conditions of declining inflation will boost their purchasing power. Two permanent supplements to pensions and disability benefits will probably be maintained. The radical increase in the child-rearing benefit (500+) will ensure it better protects families with children from poverty. An increase in the income criterion and the minimum and maximum levels of the permanent benefit for people completely unable to work will also be implemented (but see the section about voices of social workers). For these reasons, one can expect that poverty in 2024 may show a declining trend compared to 2023.

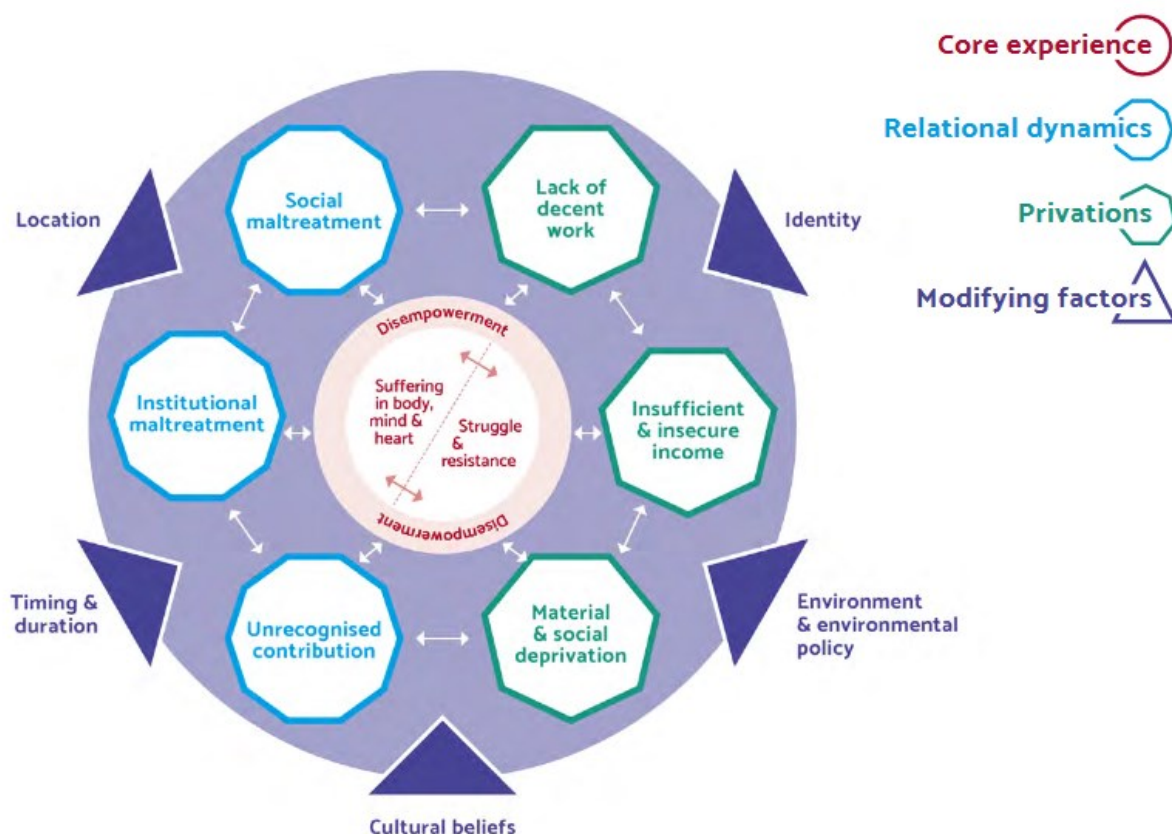
Voices of people experiencing poverty and social workers

In the statistics shown in the first part of the report, poverty is defined by insufficient expenditures or incomes and problems with meeting basic needs. The statistics conceal the complexity of the experiences of individual people and families, and the economic dimension does not exhaust the intricacies of poverty itself.

ATD Fourth World, a member organization of EAPN Poland, has developed a multidimensional poverty model (figure 1). This was the result of international participatory research involving collaboration with individuals who experience various problems related to poverty and social exclusion in several rich and poor countries, as well as with researchers from the University of Oxford. This model also takes into account economic dimension, treatment in institutions and by society, the sense of influence over one's own life, and emotions.³⁸

Figure 1. Multidimensional poverty model

³⁸ Two reports based on this model see: A. i R. Szarfenberg, *Wielowymiarowe ubóstwo senioralne*, WRZOS, 2019, <http://wrzos.org.pl/download/Ubostwo%20osob%20starszych%20ekspertyza%202020.pdf>, R. Bakalarczyk, *Wielowymiarowe ubóstwo osób z niepełnosprawnościami i ich bliskich*, WRZOS, 2020, http://www.wrzos.org.pl/download/Wielowymiarowe_ubostwo_osob_z_niepelnosprawnosciami.pdf



Source: *Hidden dimensions of poverty*, ATD Fourth World, University of Oxford, 2019. <https://www.atd-quartmonde.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Hidden-Dimensions-of-Poverty-20-11-2019.pdf>

The statements below were obtained from individuals experiencing poverty at facilities for the homeless, in social welfare homes, and from those living in small rented flats. The survey contained questions according to the following dimensions: material (professional situation, financial situation, cost of living), social (interactions with society), institutional (interactions with institutions), and emotional (negative and positive feelings related to the situation and its changes). We asked about experiences and feelings from September 2022 to July 2023.

Voices of people experiencing poverty

This year, we will focus on individuals who were in facilities for people in a homelessness crisis, in training apartments for such individuals, or lived in social welfare homes. The majority of them were men.

Table 3. People experiencing poverty about their life

Information about the person	Dimension	Quotations
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Man, 43 years old, secondary education, employed, two-person training apartment	Material	Transition from a shelter for people in a homelessness crisis to a training apartment. Financial independence, debt repayment, self-sustenance. My income allows me to support myself independently and pay off overdue debts.
	Institutional	Stay at an alcohol detoxification ward, direct contact.
	Emotional	A difficult situation related to alcoholism and relapse, which was less overwhelming than in recent years, resolved relatively quickly. The point is that there is no feeling of hopelessness because things are moving in a positive direction in a safe environment.
Man, 46 years old, higher education, full-time employment, shelter for the homeless	Material	Forced eviction from my own apartment due to a conflict with my wife. Later, temporary lodging at the Crisis Intervention Centre with my 16-year-old son. I was then transferred from the CIC to a centre for those in a homelessness crisis. It is definitely noticeable that the prices of basic necessities are constantly rising, which to some extent affects me. Income from full-time employment no longer covered the basic expenses of my son and me (clothes, apparel). I couldn't afford to save by the end of the month, which made me feel utterly helpless. I also encountered problems with overdue loan repayments from a time when my marriage was stable. Due to these circumstances, I significantly reduced my expenses on basic needs. This led to a situation where, despite a substantial income, I cannot afford a short trip with my son, and I'm forced to buy lower-quality food because I can't afford more nutritious meals.
	Institutional	Police - online shopping scam, repeated marital conflicts. School - parent-teacher conferences, etc., Social Welfare Centre - family and housing situation. City Office - Legal advice. Court - Filing lawsuits. Direct and indirect contacts (via the Internet). Mostly negative due to personal nature, marital problems, and overall family situation. Positive - because of the help and support, and understanding received.
	Emotional	Helplessness, imprisonment, entrapment - due to the inability to escape from a toxic marriage - escalating feelings, to the point of deep depression. Lack of agency and fear in the face of constant intimidation by my wife – loan problems, lack of contact with children. Last month – beginnings of building independence, starting the fight in court for children and assets, attempts to end marriage and relationship with my wife. Unfortunately, not entirely on my own. without the help of psychologists, it would not have been possible. For the first time in years, there is

		hope that things might get better, that I might succeed, to free myself from a toxic and abusive wife/partner.
Man, 49 years old, incomplete secondary education, unemployed, homeless shelter, two-person room	Material	Since July 2023 in the shelter, before that, the street. I lived off casual jobs, so-called gigs, which allowed me to buy basic necessities.
	Social	Now I have contact with my son and his family (granddaughter) since arriving at the shelter, previously street acquaintances – negative relationships.
	Emotional	I felt helpless living on the streets. Once I had a place to stay, the problems subsided. Currently, I feel I can make up for all I lost before, thanks to the assistance of a psychiatrist, psychologist. Thanks to the Foundation, I felt needed by society again. I feel safe, capable of handling my issues, which previously didn't work out so well. Now, thanks to the trust people have given me, I do my best not to betray that trust.
Man, 77 years old, primary education, unemployed, homeless shelter, two-person room	Material	I have been living in the shelter for 4 years. I am unemployed, tried to do odd jobs, but it's hard due to age, illnesses. Income is only a benefit from the Social Welfare Centre, loans from friends, and expenditures are only for essentials.
	Social	I have contacts with people from senior workshops, occasionally a friend, a former shelter resident - a chess friend. My family has passed away. I like meeting friends.
	Emotional	Anger, helplessness is felt when I run out of cigarettes. Fear of being placed in a DPS [care home for adults]. I felt relief when the DPS was called off. Relief also knowing I can stay in the shelter.
Woman, 40 years old, primary education, unemployed, homeless shelter, three-person room	Material	I took a course at CIS for a manual worker. I'm glad I was able to take the course and earn my own money. My income is too low. It's hardest to pay for medicine, cigarettes, buy glasses, shoes, underwear. I find it hard to repay friends. I borrow to return and then borrow again immediately. I cut down on food expenses and, for example, buying glasses.
	Emotional	I feel sad and very sorry that I can't earn enough money. I felt helpless when I couldn't afford an apartment. Rooms for rent are too expensive. I also feel helpless when I can't afford medicine, glasses, and basic necessities. I'm happy when things go well, when I get good news from the doctor, when there's a chance for a job.
Man, 75 years old, vocational education, retired, first in a penal institution with a three-person cell, now in a shelter in a single room	Material	In prison, I couldn't afford to buy anything. The available funds were transferred to my son for financial assistance.
	Emotional	Feelings of helplessness, the inability to overcome difficulties, being overwhelmed by problems - throughout my time in

		<p>prison. Loneliness - lack of contact with my son, this pain grew day by day.</p> <p>After leaving prison - a glimmer of hope for a better tomorrow.</p>
<p>Woman, 77 years old, primary education, retired, occasional work, four-room training apartment, has her own room</p>	Material	<p>In my earnings, the only change was a pension increase - an adjustment of 250 PLN, I'm still repaying overdue loans, there are deductions from the bailiff, I financially helped my children... but still too little to live normally.</p> <p>I have living costs for the apartment, loan repayments, plus costs associated with a sanatorium visit.</p>
	Social	<p>My relationship with my daughter-in-law changed, I lost contact with my grandson who was placed in a foster home, conflict with my son addicted to drugs, who is currently undergoing treatment.</p>
	Emotional	<p>I had difficulties contacting my son, who is addicted to drugs and would visit me at home, but the Foundation helped, ensuring safety. The situation is difficult for me because it concerns a child I can't help, the stay in the sanatorium helped, some therapy for parents of addicts, conversations with the Foundation staff, the change is that my son started methadone therapy.</p>
<p>Man, 65 years old, secondary education, rehabilitation benefit, multi-person training apartment, has his own room</p>	Material	<p>In August 2022, when I fell ill, I was placed in a shelter for the homeless. That year, I was hospitalized six times (a total of 3 months)... Before that, I rented an apartment, but when I got sick, I couldn't maintain it and needed help. Then, my employer helped me get to the shelter where I was assisted.</p>
	Social	<p>I got to know the employer's assistance, met good people in the Foundation, and now in the apartment, I'm managing. I don't have contact with my family, but I have new friends.</p>
	Emotional	<p>I felt sadness and helplessness in the situation of illness and when I had nowhere to go, but the employer and then the Foundation helped, giving me hope that I'll manage...</p> <p>When I started feeling better, I saw a light at the end of the tunnel, and then, when I moved into a training apartment.</p>
<p>Man, 64 years old, vocational education, job-seeking, single-room training apartment</p>	Material	<p>At first, I worked in a supermarket based on a contract as a janitor in a cleaning company. Over time, there was job frustration - instability, exploitation, and staff problems. Then, in February, I went on a CIS course - qualification as a janitor in July 2023, then job hunting and waiting for retirement.</p> <p>The funds received from the contract allowed me to save up for the idea of living on my own when staying in the shelter.</p> <p>When I started working at CIS, my income increased slightly. During this period, I didn't take out loans.</p> <p>Income was sufficient for accommodation fees. Increase in expenses related to clothing, food, and cleaning products. I notice a price increase on the same income. Life varies, but despite expenses, I manage to save. I've denied myself clothing and food. I eat increasingly poorer quality food. I find</p>

		it a waste of money on butter, making my own food substitutes. I spread lard (from bacon) on bread daily instead of butter. I haven't taken out loans for my needs, I fear the risk of not being able to repay later debts, it's definitely easier to deny myself something. There are arrears in debt repayments, I only pay symbolic amounts that we agreed with the bailiff to avoid interest and debt growth. I'm prepared to live modestly, and I'm okay with it.
	Institutional	I had contact with clinics, the employment office - obtaining social insurance, NFZ contributions, employment mediation, with CIS - taking a course, a psychologist, a lawyer, a therapist, the Social Welfare Center – support, environmental interviews, obtaining shelter and paying for it. Also, contact with the probation officer - meetings as a recidivist. Positive feelings - I always get support, everyone always helped whenever I needed it.
	Emotional	There were difficult moments, I had breakdowns, sadness, regret. In sincere conversations - letting out certain unpleasant situations - family, friends. Over the years, it varied... When I saw my own agency in getting a job, seeing my progress. I had income and felt valuable.
Man, 59 years old, vocational education, job-seeking, in a homeless shelter in a two-person room	Material	I worked until January 2023 - until then I was professionally active. From the end of January during my stay in prison, until now I'm unemployed. My wife evicted me from the apartment and I became homeless. Currently, I'm registered at the employment office, waiting for job offers and also trying to find a job myself. The plan - find a good job and become independent. Previously, running a household with my wife, our incomes were enough to meet basic needs, including maintaining a rented place, food, clothing, and we even managed to save something.
	Emotional	When I became homeless, I felt helpless and in turmoil - what next. My sister advised me to go to the Social Welfare Center and I got help there. Officials directed me to a shelter for the homeless. Here I received help - a roof over my head, food, and a warm family atmosphere. For the first time since then, I felt safe. The feeling of hope appeared when I found shelter, then I felt that it can only get better, that everything is fine and I can handle all this. I'll find a job and be independent.
Woman, 70 years old, vocational education, center for	Material	For some time, I lived in a center for victims of violence. I have very bad associations with that stay. I won't talk about it because I don't want to remember it. Later, I spent nights in a multi-person warming shelter, where there were different

the homeless, two-person room		<p>people every day of various ages and genders. Then I got a place in a 2-person room, where I currently reside.</p> <p>I sustain myself with a regular social assistance benefit. I used to receive an extra 160 PLN for a diet. now it's 200 PLN. Minor changes, but they exist. When it comes to disabled people in Poland, it works very poorly, it's not adequate to what it should be. Disabled people will always be at a disadvantage because the medicines are expensive, etc. It's bad.</p> <p>In the centre, I don't bear any housing costs. I only buy food. Prices are what they are, they keep rising. It's tough. If I had money, I would try to rent a room, but who would rent something to an old lady? I applied to the DPS, I don't know what will come of it. I can't manage, my legs are getting worse, especially with the changing weather, it's terrible. Social assistance helps me with purchasing medicines. they cover my meds. The rest goes to food, allowing me to maintain a diet. I have enough clothes. I don't think about buying new ones.</p>
	Institutional	<p>I'm in constant contact with MOPR. the girls (social workers) are nice. I have no problem talking to them, they always provide me with complete information. Here in the center, there are kind people, including 3 boys. Everyone's nice, which is rare.</p>
	Emotional	<p>Given my health, I feel worse now, and I know I'm helpless in many situations.</p> <p>Now I hope to "go to the ground" [pass away] as soon as possible. Only pain, pain, pain, painkillers don't work, I can't undergo any treatment. It can only get worse. I think it's only willpower that lets me get up every day.</p>
Woman, 78 years old, higher education, retired, single room in a social welfare home	Material	<p>There was no increase in benefits. I receive 100 PLN less than before because I am in the process of consumer bankruptcy repayment. the trustee takes 100 PLN more than the bailiff did, reducing my income. Every few months, I apply for a temporary exemption from the 400 PLN house fee because most of my pension goes to DPS payments.</p> <p>There was a price increase for DPS. Most of my pension is taken by the trustee, and from what remains, 70% goes to the house. My income doesn't cover the house fee - 5000 PLN - the state subsidizes for me. I lacked money for medicines, can't afford glasses, lack money for cosmetics and cleaning products. I couldn't buy the most essential things. Only temporarily am I exempt from part of the fee (up to 400 PLN), most months I have just over a hundred, which is barely enough for anything. I'm on the brink of poverty.</p>
	Emotional	<p>I feel frustration and constant stress. I'm being treated for depression.</p> <p>It's so frustrating when I talk about it, I get very agitated. What I talk about directly concerns me. When I make myself aware</p>

		of this, speaking about it, I tremble all over. I can't continue. my tongue gets tangled...
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Source: own elaboration

The aforementioned situations concern people of retirement age or approaching it and middle-aged individuals. Some of the former receive pensions, or expect them, but there are also those who don't. In social welfare homes, 70 per cent of the pension is allocated for the cost of stay and services. In other cases, we are dealing with individuals living off social assistance benefits (permanent benefit, purpose-specific benefits, food assistance). Their living conditions are either multi-person rooms or single rooms in shelters, training apartments, and social welfare homes. We also see individuals in homelessness crises due to marital conflicts. Sometimes, even income from employment is not sufficient to meet all needs.

We also have a few interviews with people who live in apartments, not in facilities. In both cases, they were single mothers. The first concerns a family from Ukraine. Five people live in a two-room flat.

- „There were six of us, but now there are five. My sister fled from Ukraine because of the war with her two children. Her son returned to Ukraine because he couldn't adapt here. My sister and her daughter stayed. My sister and her daughter sleep in one room, on one bed, while I, along with my son and daughter, sleep in the other room and we all sleep together on a sofa bed. My sister and I argue; it's hard, but at least she contributes to the rent. My sister works full-time, and her daughter goes to school. She wouldn't have anywhere else to go, and she knows I wouldn't throw her out. My son has autism and should have his own room, but now my sister occupies that room.”

The family income is from work and child benefits. Despite the challenging housing and financial situation, the respondent's self-assessment is: "we are not impoverished”.

- „I work a ¼ position, cleaning for over 3 years. I used to clean extra, but not anymore. I've become accustomed to this rhythm, to this ¼ position, but sometimes I can't work because the school calls, saying they can't handle my son and I need to pick him up. After all, it's a special school, they should be prepared to deal with children, especially being trained for it [referring to children with autism]. Right now, I'm not looking for work. I don't have the energy to search for something else. I'm constantly irritated, by the situation at home, at work, always being with the kids and my sister in the same apartment/room. We are not impoverished; the children are clean, dressed, and we have toys. Sometimes we go for ice cream.”.

Dealing in various institutions can be frustrating.

- Social services - "Such bureaucrats, if this stamp isn't right, then something there... [phone rings during the meeting] - she just called me back, you heard, she didn't even let me speak. [A woman from social services called back since she didn't pick up earlier.] She doesn't even know if they can help pay for school breakfasts. Now, the social service pays for lunches at school. I constantly get notifications that they are unpaid, and I don't know why this happens. It feels odd getting these reminders when it should be paid. The office – they weren't helpful, and I don't know much about it. It's always like this... No help and they just send me away empty-handed. Because I am Ukrainian, and the kids are Polish, and I'm not allowed to raise them in my own way. There was also a time when I received benefits, but then it turned out that I have to repay them because you can't receive alimony and benefits simultaneously. School – the

special school my son attends - Sometimes they can't handle him. They call saying he misbehaves and I have to pick him up when I am at work. When I came, I hugged him, but the teacher told me I shouldn't do that, but instead, draw attention to his bad behaviour, not hug him".

The family's social contacts in the neighbourhood vary. Some neighbours threaten, but others understand the family's situation.

- „Once a neighbour came over and said I shouldn't yell at the kids or she'd make the necessary call. I'm a bit afraid she might call somewhere. I once visited a psychologist but only went a few times. They kicked me out of these sessions. I'm no longer that trusting, I don't open up to people because it often backfires. Instead of helping, they cause harm. Another neighbour, who's older and raises her granddaughter, helps me. She understands me, I've always said that only someone with similar problems can understand another. Just like me, she knows how hard it is to raise a child.”

The second family consists of a mother with three children also living in a two-room apartment they rent. The cost of housing is overwhelming for the family, even though both the mother and the eldest daughter work.

- "The rent has increased by 200 PLN. When inflation went up, the owner raised my rent by 200. He wanted 3000, I said: I can't afford that. So, he agreed to 200 PLN for now."
- "My daughter stopped attending vocational school because we couldn't afford the rent, so she's been working at Żabka [grocery chain] for two years now and splits the rent with me. The next son is in the second year of vocational school. He had internships and also contributed from the money he earned towards the rent."
- "I've been working in kindergarten since 2019 and at the hotel since 2016, then I took a break and now I've been there for the second or third year, but the contract is in my daughter's name. I work every weekend. It depends on how many apartments I have to clean. I started at 9 and finished at 3. I had 14 apartments to clean. If there are 4 apartments on Saturday, it's not worth going... But if there's a lot on Sunday, I go every Sunday. Four Sundays a month, and what can you earn. 23 PLN per hour. It's nothing, mere pennies. That's why I'm exhausted."
- "My income from the kindergarten has increased from 2600 PLN to 3189 PLN - due to the increase in the minimum wage. I get 643 PLN as a benefit, 124 PLN per child for school, and 193 PLN for being a single mother. The social welfare centre used to provide me with food assistance, and I could benefit from Caritas, but now I've exceeded the criteria. When they used to give them to me, I didn't take cans or other things that my kids don't eat. If there were items like cheese or other things they eat, I took them. But now it's over - I've exceeded everything."

Housing costs could be reduced in social housing, but the family has trouble qualifying for it.

- "I've applied for social housing seven times, and every time I received a refusal due to the size of the apartment I rent. Now I've filed my eighth application and immediately filed a lawsuit."

Similarly, in social assistance, when support decreases with income.

- "Now I don't have regular contact [with the social welfare centre] at all, I used to have good contact. They gave me 1500 PLN. I had money for food... There were four children then. And every month I had to provide them with my income details. It's been three years since they only provided lunches. I just go to apply for school lunch funding. This year I had an argument with

them. My salary increased and exceeded the limit by 100 PLN. If the national minimum changed, their minimum should also change. Then I wouldn't exceed the limit. I don't have a good relationship with them. They think they're giving us money from their own pockets."

The mother's challenges and stress are exacerbated by the constant rise in prices.

- "Recently, I've been saying that I've had enough; I wish I could sleep and not wake up. Everything is getting more expensive - I can't handle it anymore. But then, when I wake up in the morning, I tell myself: No. You must cope. A (the youngest daughter) is still too young. The rest are already grown up, they'll manage. It's been like this a few times. This inflation is rising and rising. I leave 400 PLN in Biedronka [a supermarket chain] and bring home two bags. And that's enough for 2-3 days, on the fourth day, I go back to Biedronka – another 400 PLN. And I smoke too, the prices of cigarettes have gone up. I really don't know anymore, really enough. All the time I'm thinking, what's next, what about tomorrow".

Poverty among single individuals in institutions has its face, and so does the poverty of multi children single mothers living in too small apartments, earning too little to meet the needs of themselves and their children. In both cases, additional problems such as unpaid debts, illnesses, and a child's disability add stress and deepen negative emotions.

The Noble Gift ("Szlachetna Paczka") presents the stories of people experiencing poverty and the associated difficulties and stresses in its annual report, as well as for several weeks in the family database, which has been identified for support. In the 2022 report, a survey was conducted on the opinions of Poles about poverty, some of which were considered myths. **For example, 31 per cent of respondents (somewhat agree and strongly agree) agreed with the statement that it's enough to get to work to get out of poverty. Poverty is a result of laziness for 22 per cent of them, 17 per cent blame the poor themselves for their poverty, while 34 per cent and 15 per cent respectively agree that people choose to live on benefits or that living in poverty is a matter of choice.**³⁹ To counteract the spread of these harmful myths, we have prepared a guide for journalists on responsible representation of poverty⁴⁰.

Voices of social workers

In last year's report, we took into account the opinions of social workers regarding the social assistance system, specific benefits, and the system of determining disability and inability to live independently. The issues raised in the statements are still relevant, hence in addition to statements related to 2022 and 2023, those from the previous year were included.

Permanent Benefits and Endless Purpose-Specific Benefits

"Many of our clients are elderly people who live on a permanent benefit, the maximum amount of which is PLN 719 per month. This benefit acts as a pseudo-pension for those who do not qualify for a pension or whose pensions are lower than the income criterion for social assistance, i.e. PLN 776 for a single-person household and PLN 600 per person in a family. PLN 719 per month is not enough to survive, so

³⁹ A. Basińska, A. Gaik, A. Kropisz i in, *Raport o biedzie 2022. Tam gdzie zaczyna się bieda*, Szlachetna Paczka, 2022, <https://www.szlachetnapaczka.pl/raport-o-biedzie/>.

⁴⁰ M. Okraska, *Jak odpowiedzialnie przedstawiać ubóstwo w mediach*, WRZOS, EAPN Polska, 2022, <https://www.wrzos.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/przewodnik-odpowiedzialnego-przedstawiania-ubostwa-w-mediach.pdf>

seniors who receive it apply every month for additional cash assistance in the form of purpose-specific benefits for specific expenses: food, gas, electricity, medicines, etc. The income situation of these seniors remains unchanged, but social workers perform full administrative procedures month by month, ending with a decision. Month by month, we go to these people and conduct family interviews, Part IV, i.e., updates. But since nothing changes, month by month we write and do the same thing. It is meaningless and frustrating activity. Social workers can't help in any way here; nothing they do will change the income situation of these seniors. The problem is not just that the amount of the permanent benefit is absurd because it forces additional financial assistance, which means wasting the capacity of social workers. I don't understand why such a benefit exists in social assistance at all. A woman turns 60, a man turns 65, has no pension or too low, and is entitled to a permanent benefit for life. To grant such a benefit, you need to determine the age and income of the applicant; no regulated profession is required, basic counting, writing, and reading skills are enough."

Purpose-Specific Benefits from Space

"In my centre, the most frequently granted cash benefit is purpose-specific benefits. It's probably the same in every social assistance centre in Poland. These are benefits for specific "purposes" such as food, medicines, bills, clothing, household appliances. Some of these purposes can be made real, e.g., someone's refrigerator breaks down, and they need a new one. The social worker and the client look for a new one, find an offer, and we grant a purpose-specific benefit in such an amount that it can be bought. But how much money should be given for food? Or for underwear, household chemicals? We won't send a person to price something like that. So we give as much as we think up, or rather our managers do. I recently noticed that times are changing, but in my centre, for the same client, we have been granting PLN 30 for household chemicals since the late 1990s. Funnily enough, we grant another client not PLN 30 but PLN 50 for the same purpose. The same is true for food, some get PLN 100, others PLN 150, and others even PLN 200 per month. I'm not complaining that the legislator did not regulate this. I'm afraid such an attempt would end tragically. Nevertheless, these amounts of purpose-specific benefits have no contact with reality, actual prices, or even money in our budget."

Two Adjudications

"In 2019, a new cash benefit was introduced, paid by ZUS [central social insurance institution]. It is a benefit for people unable to live independently and amounts to a maximum of PLN 500. To get it, a medical examiner and a ZUS medical commission examine the case, and decisions on the inability to live independently are issued. Some of my clients receive this benefit. These are people who receive permanent benefits due to having a moderate degree of disability decision. These decisions are made by the district team for determining disability. There are three degrees of disability: mild, moderate, and significant. The definition of a significant degree seems close to the definition of the inability to live independently. And people with a significant degree of disability are entitled to a care benefit, PLN 215.84 per month. So I wonder how it is possible to be "only" moderately disabled according to the district team and at the same time unable to live independently according to the ZUS commission?."

Pretend Actions, i.e., a Permanent Benefit Increase from January 2024

"From the August amendment to the Social Assistance Act, it follows that from January 1, 2024, a higher income criterion for a permanent benefit will apply – 130% of the current criterion, and the maximum benefit will increase to PLN 1000. It seems to be good, because now the maximum permanent benefit is PLN 719, and that's not much if you have to live on it for a month, especially at current prices. I just don't understand why they raised the criterion only for the constant benefit and not for all our benefits."

After all, as a result, our clients on permanent benefits will not be able to use purpose-specific benefits, which they always do and thanks to which they manage to survive. Because if someone has an income of PLN 1000, it exceeds the income criterion for other benefits, which has not changed and is PLN 776. There is still a special purpose-specific benefit without an income criterion. Still, according to my centre's procedure, it can only be granted when someone has not received any benefits for the last three months. In our centre, no one has been granted such a benefit for many years. We always offer someone a permanent benefit, and if someone does not agree to it, we grant another benefit, for which a lower income criterion applies. The increase in the permanent benefit amount seems right to me, but it should be accompanied by an increase in the income criterion for all our benefits. Otherwise, there will be a need to modify our procedures and the instructions for granting benefits."

These statements provide a thorough understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by social workers within the social assistance system. To develop solutions, policymakers must consider the realities on the ground, the experiences of beneficiaries, and the concerns of the professionals working in the system.⁴¹ Strike and protest actions of the Nationwide Union Federation of Social Workers and Social Assistance also testify to the difficulties and professional challenges.⁴²

⁴¹ S. Kalinowski, A. Łuczak i in. *Diagnoza do opracowania Programu Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu Województwa Mazowieckiego na lata 2023-2026*, Mazowieckie Centrum Polityki Społecznej, 2022, https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/22235/Diagnoza_ubostwo.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁴² *Wspólny protest z pracownikami budżetówki: Pomoc społeczna manifestowała w Warszawie*, <https://federacja-socjalnych.pl/index.php/aktualnosci/pomoc-spooleczna-manifestowala-w-warszawie>

Conclusions and tasks for the new government

In the National Reform Program (update 2019/2020), the Polish government confirmed its support for social rights: **"Poland fully recognizes the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and plans its implementation also with the support of EU funds."** First, the Pillar and its principles express a position based on human and citizen rights, and not on the idea that for some other reasons, e.g., economic, demographic, or electoral, social benefits in the form of money or services should be increased, or discreetly reduced. Secondly, these rights also cover monetary benefits as income protection. Thirdly, they also take into account the rights to benefits in the form of services, but also to decent working conditions and wages.

Income protection

Let's start with the principles regarding income protection and support in this area. There are several of them and they concern several different groups, which this report discusses regarding poverty.

- **Children have the right to protection from poverty** (principle 11).
- **Every elderly person has the right to have funds that allow a decent life** (principle 15).
- **Disabled people have the right to income support, ensuring a decent life** (principle 17).
- **Every poor person has the right to an adequate minimum income ensuring a decent life at all stages** (principle 14).
- **The unemployed have the right to proper benefits received for a reasonable time** (principle 13).
- **Employees have the right to remuneration, which should ensure a decent standard of living (...)** **working poverty should be prevented** (principle 6).

Regardless of the election results, we hope that the new government will still feel bound by the above declaration concerning the protection, respect, and realization of the above rights of children, the elderly, people with disabilities, the poor, the unemployed, and workers living in poverty. Below, recently introduced measures in the field of income protection will be considered and the problems that should be addressed in this regard.

Among these measures, the most important from the perspective of income poverty will be a significant increase in the child-raising benefit (500+) for families with children, a second permanent addition to pensions from social insurance, an increase in the income criterion, and the maximum permanent benefit from social assistance for people completely unable to work. For people with disabilities with increased care needs and their caregivers, the adoption of an Act on support benefit is also essential.

The year 2024 marks another year of statutory revision of income criteria and amounts of social assistance and family benefits, including family allowances and supplements. Firstly, the government should significantly raise the criteria for social assistance. An increase in the criterion and maximum amount only for a permanent benefit left the criteria for other benefits at too low a level compared to inflation. **The situation where some extremely poor families have no access to financial social assistance must be ended.**

Secondly, the criteria and amounts for family benefits are far from adequate. Their long-term freezing in light of the removal of income criteria in the child benefit (500+) in 2019 and tax reform in 2022 means that mainly wealthier families benefited from these solutions, while poorer ones lost out. Therefore, there's an opportunity in the next review to substantially raise the criteria and level of family benefits. **Poor families need support more than wealthy ones. The current system has a proportional universalism character. We have universal child benefit and benefits aimed at poor families, considering**

their lower incomes. Both pillars of this system should be taken care of constantly, not just from one election to another.

A systematic solution to the failures of benefits indexation for children is to introduce new rules that cover all benefits in the same way. **The three-year cycle of deciding on the verification of social assistance benefits and family benefits, as well as the discretionary indexation of the child benefit (500+), should be replaced.** Indexation should be done every year by at least the price growth index, and if inflation is higher, indexation should be conducted twice a year. This will prevent another cycle of freezing benefits for children with sudden increases in some of them in the next elections.

Let's now focus on elderly and people with disabilities. Two one-off supplements to pensions and disability benefits were permanently introduced this year. Along with the tax reform, they helped maintain the real value of retirement and disability benefits in 2022. Meanwhile, the March indexation in 2023 already took into account the increased inflation from 2022, so supplements no longer have such importance in maintaining the real value of pensions.

Thinking systematically, the main function in this area should be annual or more frequent indexation. A solution should be introduced to trigger it twice a year when inflation exceeds a certain threshold, e.g., 5%. Equally important is the constant income support for poor elderly and disabled people who do not have the right to pensions and disability benefits. In this context, it's worth noting that the supplementary benefit for persons unable to live independently has been frozen at a maximum of PLN 500. **The more general conclusion is that adding new benefits to existing ones complicates the entire system and makes it harder to adjust them all to inflation.**

For people with disabilities and care needs, the supportive benefit will be a significant change. This new benefit can be combined without restrictions with other benefits for disabled people, e.g., a social pension. The debate around this measure primarily focuses on the criteria for accessing the new benefit based on a scale of support needs assessment. This scale has not been presented for public discussion and may not account for the specific situation of some individuals requiring care, e.g., people with autism, and the score threshold to receive the benefit is quite high. Secondly, the new benefit cannot be combined with the carer's allowance, and the right to a carer's allowance is excluded when the child turns 18. Carers' communities have postulated to allow combining the carer's allowance with work, not to abolish the right to the benefit when the dependent turns 18. Thirdly, the draft bill was submitted to the Sejm (Polish parliament) without public consultation, which, given the controversies associated with it, was even more problematic.⁴³

The impact of the supporting benefit on the income situation of families with persons with disabilities, as well as those persons themselves and their poverty, is unclear. **There are opinions that the poverty of these families will increase. This is because the rights to the caregiver's nursing benefit were limited, and the new benefit for persons with increased care needs was not designed to fully compensate for this first restriction and additionally increase the incomes of these families and individuals.** The future government should therefore be open to further discussion about benefits for caregivers and for the disabled themselves, including the support benefit, in order to reduce their poverty and ensure it isn't higher than for individuals and families without disabilities. In this case, we see a way to reform cash benefits by adding new ones, even though there are benefits with similar purposes.

⁴³ M. Różański, *Prezydent podpisał ustawę o świadczeniu wspierającym. Co to oznacza?*, Niepełnosprawni.pl, <http://www.niepelnosprawni.pl/ledge/x/2121462>

From the remaining problems in the area of income support, it is worth highlighting the problems with the level of unemployment benefits, periodic social assistance benefits, and housing allowances.

According to the standards of the International Labour Organization, the basic unemployment benefit should be linked to the minimum wage so that it cannot be lower than 50 per cent of this wage. **In 2022, it was lower by 200 PLN, in 2023 the difference increased to over 300 PLN. Therefore, the law should be changed so that unemployment benefits cannot be lower than 50 per cent of the minimum wage.**

For poor people able to work, who are not entitled to unemployment benefits (the majority of the unemployed), the only guaranteed benefit remains the periodic social assistance benefit. The problem is that the granting period is discretionary and the guaranteed amount of this benefit is 388 PLN for a one-person household without any income (50% of the difference between the income criterion and the income). This is an amount lower than the extreme poverty line (835 PLN) by 447 PLN. If this person also performed the maximum allowed 40 hours of socially useful work (intended for those using social assistance) with the official rate of 10.90 PLN (lower than the minimum hourly rate by 13 PLN), they would still have a total income lower than the subsistence minimum. **This shows how stingy our guaranteed social assistance is for this group of people. This situation seems to be in stark contrast to the European Union's recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion from 2023.**⁴⁴

Housing allowances, reformed in 2021, fundamentally differ from other benefits with the level of income criteria. After the reform, these criteria are referenced to the average wage, which led to their substantial increase. In this way, access to the allowances has been expanded – the number of allowances increased by 7 percent and their total amount by 19 per cent in 2022. The second criterion is based on the area, so a low income must also be accompanied by limited living space in an apartment or house. The allowances aim to compensate for only a part of housing expenses, limiting the rate to those in municipal apartments. **This means that they are very low and unsuitable for people renting apartments in the private market. The average allowance in 2022 was only 275 PLN.**⁴⁵

The issue of diversifying income criteria for different benefits is a problem in itself. Why are the income criteria for housing allowances so high compared to those for social assistance or family benefits? Why is the income criterion for food aid twice as high as the criteria for social assistance benefits? Why, from 2024, will the criterion for a permanent benefit be higher than that for periodic or purpose-specific social assistance? Similar questions concern the verification and indexation of monetary benefits. Why are some indexed annually based on the minimum wage, while others have not been raised for years? **The new government should consider these questions and reflect together with other stakeholders on what can be done with this criterion and indexation chaos.**

This is just a small snippet of the problems concerning the Polish income protection system. Many of them surfaced during the cost-of-living crisis and with subsequent legal changes.⁴⁶ We are dealing with

⁴⁴ Zalecenie Rady w sprawie odpowiedniego dochodu minimalnego zapewniającego aktywne włączenie, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023H0203%2801%29>

⁴⁵ Gospodarka mieszkaniowa w 2022 roku, GUS, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/infrastruktura-komunalna-nieruchomosci/nieruchomosci-budynki-infrastruktura-komunalna/gospodarka-mieszkaniowa-w-2022-roku,14,6.html>

⁴⁶ Pensions and disability benefits see: P. Szewiła, *Rząd dba o emerytów, kiedy mu pasuje. Przed wyborami*, Rzeczpospolita, wrzesień 2023, <https://www.rp.pl/praca-emerytury-i-renty/art39092861-rzad-dba-o-emerytow-kiedy-mu-pasuje-przed-wyborami>

the maladjustment of the principles for setting the level of virtually all benefits to high inflation. However, other issues remain, such as those concerning periodic social assistance benefits or pensions.

Social services

Social policy aimed at combating poverty based on human and citizen rights should consider not only income protection but also social services. We hope that the declaration that the Polish government recognizes and will implement the European Pillar of Social Rights will be respected by the new government. The Pillar's principles on social and public services cover various groups of people at risk of poverty and safeguard their access to various services, including provision of energy, clean water, sanitation, transport, financial services, and digital connectivity.

- **Children** have the right to access **high-quality and affordable early education and childcare services**. (...) **Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to special funds** aimed at increasing equal opportunities (principle 11).
- **People with disabilities** have the right to services that allow them to participate in the labour market and social life, as well as a work environment tailored to their needs (principle 17).
- **Every person living in poverty** has the right to (...) effective **access to supportive goods and services**. For those capable of work, minimum income benefits should be linked to incentives for (re)engagement in the labour market (principle 14).
- **Unemployed** individuals have the right to appropriate activation support from public employment services aimed at (re-)integration into the labour market (principle 13). (...) to continuous and consistent support tailored to their individual needs. Long-term unemployed individuals have the right to an in-depth individual assessment (principle 4).
- **Homeless people receive appropriate accommodation and services that promote their social integration** (principle 19).
- **Everyone has the right to affordable and high-quality long-term care services, especially home care and community services** (principle 18).
- **Everyone has the right to access basic high-quality services, including water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services, and digital connectivity services. Those in need will receive support in accessing these services** (principle 20).

The most important strategic document of the current government in this area is the Social Services Development Strategy until 2030 (with a perspective to 2035) adopted in August 2022. Its direct goal is not to reduce income poverty but homelessness and social exclusion. The monitoring however only envisages indicators such as the number of social enterprises created or the percentage of municipalities where a social services centre will be established (new type of organization replacing social welfare centres). These are intermediate goal indicators, meaning their achievement may help in reducing homelessness and social exclusion. The next government should follow this strategy in designing its policy, **but it does not cover all groups and services listed above. The Strategy lacks early care and education for children from poorer families, adequate support for the unemployed, especially the long-term ones. It also does not consider access to essential basic services such as water, energy, transport, banking services, broadband internet. These services are also very important for families and individuals experiencing poverty.**

Groups covered by the Strategy are more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. This is evident for people in a homelessness crisis, but also for people with disabilities, individuals in mental crises, and

children placed in foster care. Restricting freedom can also cause poverty in such a way that a person confined to a facility cannot work, and the benefits they receive are controlled by the institution. Some institutions provide services on a co-payment basis and take 70% of the income. This leaves very little money for individuals in institutions for their personal needs and is one dimension of the hidden poverty problem. We have seen examples of these issues in the experiences of people living in social welfare homes.

The strategy concerning the development of social services was developed according to the principles of deinstitutionalization⁴⁷, from which it follows that the priority is assistance in the community and in housing, and not in 24-hour stay facilities such as homeless shelters, social welfare homes, care and education institutions, or psychiatric hospitals separated from local communities.

This approach has long been present in foster care policy, where, among other things, age criteria were introduced excluding the admission of younger children to institutions, or criteria for the number of places per institution to limit their size. The effectiveness of this policy depends on the control of compliance with criteria and a sufficient supply of non-institutional forms of foster care, especially foster families. Since neither the GUS nor Eurostat research child poverty outside households, it is unknown whether it occurs in care and education institutions or others where children and teenagers reside. As for foster families, which are entitled to benefits due to providing foster care, some may be found in research samples of statistical studies, but in the presentation of results, this type of family is not distinguished.

In the context of programs to combat child poverty, it is worth mentioning **three innovative two-generation programs focusing on comprehensive support for both parents and children simultaneously**. They concerned families who had been long term recipients of social assistance. They can be considered programs that prevent placing children in foster care. The projects were implemented as part of the Operational Program Knowledge Education Development (PO WER) competition "Breaking the process of inherited poverty in degraded areas".

- Praski Kokon (Warsaw).
- Potencjały, nowe formy kapitału społecznego (Przasnysz municipality).
- Fachowa siła przyszością rodziny (Wodzisław Śląski municipality).

The lessons derived from these projects for social policy should be used in the discussion about what is worth funding in Polish social assistance and how to reform it, when the goal is to prevent placing children in foster care and counteracting the intergenerational transmission of poverty and material and social deprivation.⁴⁸

The second group that has long been covered by deinstitutionalization strategies includes individuals experiencing mental crises, those with mental illnesses, who are placed in psychiatric hospitals and social care homes for people with chronic mental illnesses. The idea of community psychiatry is crucial in this area and is being developed in Poland. Just as with child poverty in foster care, little is known about the poverty of people undergoing mental crises and those with mental illnesses, not only those residing in full-time facilities, but also those living in apartments. Many of them have disability

⁴⁷ See: <https://www.deinstytucjonalizacja.info/>

⁴⁸ Raport końcowy z badania w zakresie innowacji społecznych oraz oceny konkursu dotyczącego przeciwdziałania ubóstwu, https://www.power.gov.pl/media/105643/IV_raport_innowacje_spol.pdf

certificates, but the GUS and Eurostat studies do not present the extent or depth of poverty divided by types of disabilities. Thus, this is another hidden poverty about which we know very little.

In Poland, there still exist social care homes for children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities as well as for adults with such disabilities. Further scandals related to acts of violence against the children in these homes⁴⁹ have highlighted the importance of deinstitutionalization in assisting these groups of people. Their needs, resources, and abilities are somewhat different than those of individuals undergoing mental crises or suffering from mental illnesses. **In this case, service support for families with such members with disabilities is of great importance, for instance, daytime care in community self-help homes or in the form of respite care.**

It's possible that, to the least extent, assistance for individuals in a homelessness crisis, those chronically homeless, was treated by Polish governments from a deinstitutionalization perspective. For example, one of the aims of the government's housing program was to increase the number of places in shelters. These individuals and families are by far the most vulnerable to poverty and the lack of basic needs fulfilment. In this instance, the discussed Strategy seems to be groundbreaking, especially when we juxtapose it with a measurable goal from the National Program for Counteracting Poverty and Social Exclusion from 2021 – the number of homeless individuals becoming independent is set to rise from 2,600 in 2020 to 15,000 by 2030. In the Strategy for social services, the main tools for transforming this shelter policy into a housing one have been listed, alongside goals for 2030, which are described below.

- Supported housing (7,000 by 2030).
- Programmes for the prevention of excessive debt from rental payments and evictions (15 per cent of municipalities by 2030).
- Transformation of homeless shelters into combined supported housing or emergency facilities (25% of shelters).
- Social rental agencies subleasing apartments to impoverished individuals and families, combined with a range of supporting services (45 by 2030).⁵⁰
- Streetworking (80 municipalities by 2030).

It's worth noting two pilot project of Housing First approach⁵¹, which were initially aimed at people in the most severe homelessness crisis. It has garnered significant support within the international political and expert community. We also see that, just like in the case of institutional foster care, preventing homelessness is essential. Homelessness has diverse macro causes, e.g., economic crises, humanitarian crises, natural disasters, and micro causes like low income, family conflicts, mental illness, and lack of family care. Preventing homelessness, as well as extreme poverty, involves ensuring good quality public policies.

Deinstitutionalization may apply to older people with limited independence, including those living in poverty. However, its necessity in this case is less obvious. This is because the level of institutional care for elderly people with limited independence in Poland is relatively low. Their families (mostly women)

⁴⁹ Case from 2022 r.: D. Faron, S. Jadczyk, *Piekło u zakonnic. Bicie, wiązanie, zamykanie w klatce. Horror dzieci w DPS pod Krakowem*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/pieklo-u-zakonnic-bicie-wiazanie-zamykanie-w-klatce-horror-dzieci-w-dps-pod-krakowem-6778332058069696a>

⁵⁰ Several social rental agencies projects are financed by government programme „Wzajemnie potrzebni”. <https://wzajemniepotrzebni.pl/>

⁵¹ A. Bokszczyński, P. Jaskulski, M. Sochocki i in. *Raport z analizy efektów testowanego rozwiązania*, Projekt „Housing First – Najpierw Mieszkanie”, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uqS-Jo8AnhseXF3s5CrMQtVeAwHxIL-e/view>

provide care, either in the homes of these elderly individuals or in their own accommodation. Due to demographic factors, the demand for long-term care will continuously grow, while the potential for family care will decrease. The Strategy plans several actions in this area, not all specific to the elderly.

- Periodic assessment of a resident's independence potential (100 per cent of facilities to conduct such assessments by 2030).
- Providing single rooms "when possible" in social welfare homes.

For the second action, the baseline value in the Strategy is zero, which might mean that no social welfare home in Poland typically offers single rooms. By 2030, this is expected to be 30 per cent of the places.

In the realm of long-term care and poverty, a significant goal is to ensure that "the need for care does not lead to poverty and financial dependence and also addresses inequality in access to care and health outcomes."⁵²

The Strategy for Social Services Development will be mainly funded in Poland by the European Social Fund under the central European Funds for Social Development program and regional programs for the 2021-2027 financial period. The WRZOS federation has prepared **recommendations on the strategy's implementation in partnership with non-governmental organizations.**⁵³

The Strategy doesn't cover all groups identified in the EFPS. This is mainly because its guiding idea relates to deinstitutionalization concerning full-time facilities. **It overlooks several essential rights and social services and selectively addresses problems of selected groups more vulnerable to poverty, where only a small portion resides in full-time facilities, e.g., children.** Therefore, the future government should not limit its focus to developing social services within the narrow context of deinstitutionalization but should include all services encompassed in the EFPS principles as part of anti-poverty and social exclusion policy.

An example of such services is early education and care for children (care for children up to 3 years), which is especially important for poorer families and children. For the latter, high-quality care provides much greater benefits than for children from non-poor families. For mothers, it allows for increased income from work. The future government should focus not only on the quantitative development of these services but also on which families benefit from them. **Encouraging poorer families to use these services and improving their quality should be a significant tool in countering child and family poverty in the future, and this should be anticipated in government and local programs in this area.**

Poland has become a country where immigration outweighs emigration. Due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, over 950,000 Ukrainian refugees are still registered with special status, and even 20 percent of them might experience poverty and homelessness. Supporting this group is a challenge for the future government. **Interesting local policies for integrating migrants into city life have been developed and need to be promoted.**⁵⁴ However, it's uncertain whether they sufficiently address the needs of impoverished and homeless migrants and refugees.

⁵² Zalecenie Rady w sprawie dostępu do przystępnej cenowo opieki długoterminowej wysokiej jakości, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52022DC0441>

⁵³ Rekomendacje Krajowe w zakresie rozwoju usługi społecznych i deinstytucjonalizacji, <https://www.deinstytucjonalizacja.info/blog/rekomendacje-krajowe-w-zakresie-rozwoju-uslugi-spoecznych-i>

⁵⁴ K. Homel i in. *Model lokalnej polityki włączania migrantów i migrantek w życie miast. Założenia i rekomendacje*, Laboratorium Polityk Migracyjnych Miast i Regionów OBM UW, Warszawa 2023, https://nomada.info.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Model_polityki_wlaczania_migrantow_i_migrantek_FIN.pdf

Energy poverty requires a comprehensive program, a significant challenge. Cooperation is essential between stakeholders concerning poverty and social exclusion and environmental issues. We hope the new government will engage in activities in this field along with local governments⁵⁵, **but also the new tools introduced in 2022 will be evaluated: the ban on electricity disconnection in autumn and winter months and support programs for sensitive (eligible for housing allowance) customers, which obligated electric and gas energy sellers (art. 5ga of the Energy Law).** The government, in discussions with other stakeholders, should consider the investment strategy proposal concerning housing stock renovation, which was recently presented in the context of energy poverty.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Jak wspierać odbiorcę wrażliwego energii i redukować ubóstwo energetyczne? Bank Dobrych Praktyk już dostępny dla gmin*, Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, 2021, <https://www.gov.pl/web/klimat/jak-wspierac-odbiorce-wrażliwego-energii-i-redukowac-ubostwo-energetyczne-bank-dobrych-praktyk-juz-dostepny-dla-gmin>

⁵⁶ J. Sokołowski, *Energy Poverty and Unfit Housing in Poland. An investment strategy to renovate the worst-performing segment of the housing stock*, European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, 2023, <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2023/09/19/energy-poverty-and-unfit-housing-in-poland>

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About EAPN Poland

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is the largest European organisation of national networks as well as European and international organisations working to combat poverty. The Polish Committee of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN Poland) was established in 2007 and currently has 33 national and local organisations. EAPN Poland operates at the Working Community of Associations of Social Organisations (WRZOS).

The aim of EAPN is, inter alia, to monitor and review the activities of the state in the sphere of fighting poverty and social exclusion and to co-shape social policy in this field, at the national and European level. For more information see [EAPN](#) i [EAPN Polska](#).

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