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Multidimensional poverty and social isolation in Poland

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Abstract

For years now, statistical data on poverty and social exclusion has been the subject of special interest, both among decision-makers, designers of social programmes, and the general public. With the aim to satisfy the continually growing demands of the users of statistical information, the CSO has tried to improve and gradually extend the scope of surveys and analyses in this reference area. Since 2011, Polish official statistics adopted a new, cyclic household survey, called 'Social cohesion survey'. The results of this survey constitute an attempt at determining the scope and social diversification of various poverty forms, including multidimensional poverty, as well as assessing the risk of social isolation.

As regards poverty, three complementary dimensions were considered, i.e. income poverty, living conditions poverty, and poverty in terms of the lack of budget balance. Extending the poverty analysis so as to cover income-unrelated aspects allowed us to draw a more complete picture of this phenomenon. Based on the criteria adopted, approx. 28% of households belonged to at least one of the three poverty spheres that were considered (income poverty, living conditions poverty, or poverty in terms of the lack of budget balance), the majority of which were affected by one poverty form alone (15.5%). However, all three dimensions of poverty were accumulated in every twentieth household (approx. 5%). This group of households may be referred to as being affected by multidimensional poverty. All three poverty forms affect especially the households of persons with a low educational level, unqualified workers, unemployed persons, pensioners, single-parent and multi-children families, and single men. In these groups of households, the coexistence of all poverty forms is at least two times more frequent than the average.

An attempt was also made to explain the coexistence of all poverty forms through a logistic regression model, by defining the potential determinants of the occurrence of such a strong accumulation of negative phenomena in the financial sphere, and by estimating the "net" impacts of those determinants. The strongest "net" contribution to multidimensional poverty is attributed to the type of the source of income, the presence of an unemployed person in the household, or the educational level of the household's head. In turn, the impact of the locality type proved statistically insignificant. Therefore, the range of multidimensional poverty in rural areas being higher than in cities results from other inclusive factors included, and does not constitute an independent source of explanation.

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The weakening of social bonds and interpersonal relations is nowadays considered one of the major factors contributing to social exclusion. Social isolation is often viewed as “the essence of social exclusion”. Socially isolated persons were those for whom small (or zero) intensity of social contacts with persons from outside their household was observed. In ascertaining this variable, contacts with family, neighbours, friends and colleagues were taken into account, along with the degree of involvement in social life and in the activities of various organisations.

The survey results indicate the lack of strong correlations between poverty and social isolation. The majority of persons living in poverty manage to avoid social isolation. Therefore, we feel that with respect to decision-makers and social security systems, attention should be directed towards persons affected jointly by poverty and the lack (or a very limited level) of social relations.

Social isolation was also connected with at least one poverty form among 4% of the population aged 16 years or more. This group was referred to as being at risk of social exclusion. Furthermore, every hundredth person was affected by both multidimensional poverty (three poverty forms combined) and social isolation. The underlying determinants of social exclusion included the lack education, unemployment and disability.