

## **Initiatives taken by Municipality of Olsztyn to encourage the unemployed to look for work actively and prevent their social exclusion.**

The city of Olsztyn, the capital of the Lake District called Warmia and Mazury, is situated in the north-east part of Poland.

It has a population of 173 thousand and, as the demographic charts show, it is a city of young people. 68 per cent of the people in Olsztyn are at a working age, 19 per cent are children and teenagers and 13 per cent are retired. 54 per cent of the people are women.

As far as the sources of income are concerned, 58 per cent of the people in Olsztyn are employed in private businesses and 42 per cent work for the public sector.

The biggest companies employing people in Olsztyn are: Telekomunikacja Polska SA (telecommunications), Michelin SA (tyres), Indykpol (chicken factory), Zakład Energetyczny (electricity) and the University of Warmia and Mazury

The local labour market, however, is not able to offer the people enough jobs. The scale of unemployment, which hit Poland in the 1990s, and the rapid increase in the number of people out of work came as a big surprise.

In the region of Warmia and Mazury the rate of unemployment reaches 28.7 per cent and is still the highest in the country. In many parts of the region, however, it is even higher. The city of Olsztyn with 9 per cent of the population out of work has the lowest rate.

Most of the unemployed, i.e. 51,7 per cent graduated from grammar, secondary or vocational schools. 38.8 per cent of the unemployed are those who have been out of work for not longer than 6 months, and 46.3 per cent are those who have not worked for at least 12 months or even longer.

About 91 per cent of the unemployed are not entitled to welfare benefits from the Labour Fund.

The Labour Office in Olsztyn is taking a lot of steps in order to control the level of unemployment or even make it go down. The most important ones can be summarised in the following points:

- helping the unemployed and other people looking for work find it and helping the employers take on employees
- taking actions aimed at lowering the level of unemployment and limiting its negative social consequences

- activating the local labour market and limiting the unemployment rate by gaining and managing financial resources
- creating extra work places and helping those who are interested in starting their own businesses
- making the most of the Labour Fund by initiating different programmes, such as: intervention employment, public works, graduate recruitment, special schemes and training sessions
- refunding the costs of employment and social insurance of those young people who work full time and, at the same time, do the vocational training.

Unemployment and its economic, psychological and social consequences have a highly negative influence on family life. It lowers the living standard, makes people feel discriminated against, causes frustration and social isolation. It also lowers people's professional qualifications, deteriorates their state of health, encourages social conflicts and pathological behaviour.

Long-term unemployment causes fast economic degradation of both an individual and a family, increases the level of poverty and is often connected with cutting back spending on healthcare and education.

Parents' unemployment has a particularly negative effect on their children, especially their character and attitudes. It lowers the children's self-esteem, restricts their ambitions, prevents their skills and talents from being developed, limits their contacts with friends, and finally makes it difficult for them to make use of educational, cultural and sports institutions.

Social services are doing their best to constantly monitor and diagnose the situation of the people out of work. They make strategic plans, grant welfare benefits and distribute different things among those in need. They also co-operate with Miejski Urząd Pracy (Labour Office), Centrum Edukacji i Pracy - Warmińsko-Mazurskiej Komendy Hufca OHP (Centre for Education and Labour), Miejski Zespół Profilaktyki i Terapii Uzależnień (Centre for Preventive Treatment and Therapy of Addictions) and other institutions. They also organize courses for the unemployed teaching them how to look for work in an active way, inspire and promote new solutions in the field of unemployment.

People who have been out of work for a long time and are in danger of social exclusion make use of different forms of support provided to them by the municipal social services. Here is a list of the most important initiatives:

1. Offering clients different forms of financial and material support.
2. Initiating new forms, programmes and methods of social work, including contracts and social projects in order to change passive attitudes.
3. Providing clients with vocational, psychological, pedagogical and legal advice, e.g. teaching people how to deal with stress or raise their self-esteem.
4. Organizing therapeutic sessions for unemployment stricken families in order to prevent the children from “inheriting” this negative social phenomenon.
5. Organizing self help groups in which people looking for work can exchange information and experience.
7. Initiating and supporting actions aimed at limiting the pathological consequences of unemployment.
8. Monitoring the people who have been sent to work in a particular place.
9. Exchanging information between the Labour Office, Labour clubs and other institutions which try to make the long-term unemployed active again.
10. Making the most of other institutions’ experience, methods and resources.
11. Looking for extra financial resources.

One of the innovatory steps taken by the Municipality of Olsztyn was the launch of the Center for Social Integration. Although it has been working for a short time, the Centre has been really successful. The participants of the programme have already found work and stopped living on welfare benefits. In this way the Centre is trying to change the people’s mentality and ideas about how social services should operate.

Taking into account that unemployment, usually long-term one, is the most important social problem in Poland, one must come to the conclusion that the Centre for Social Integration in Olsztyn is a novel, innovatory and rationalised project. Its main priority is making people find work. This, in turn, is supposed to increase the living standard of an average family and meets the most important objectives of a document commonly known as “Strategia Rozwiązywania Problemów Społecznych Miasta Olsztyn” (the Strategy of Solving Social Problems in the City of Olsztyn).