

Newsletter

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Erasmus+

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Together Against Poverty



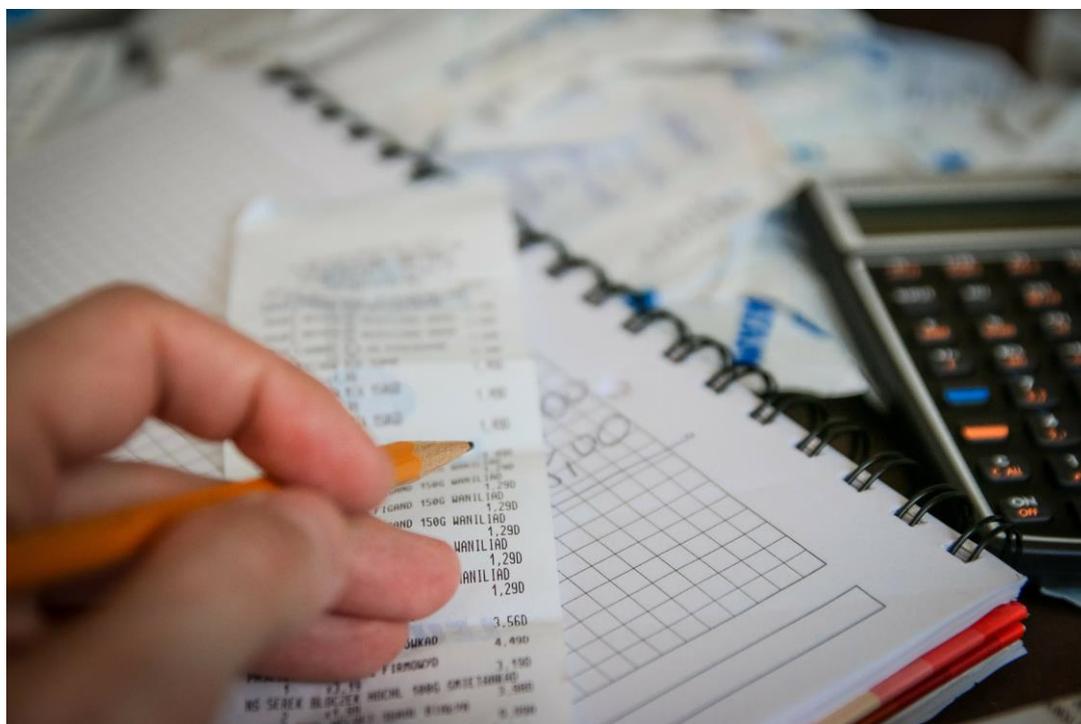
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In framework of the project, from November 2014 to January 2015 in Poland was conducted in-depth interviews with 15 representatives of the target group of the project i.e. People extremely vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. Among those participating in the study were unemployed people with low qualifications or education, single-parent families or families with many children and people with low income. Of the 15 participants interviewed, 11 people were unemployed, and 4 of them worked, but the income earned from work in the opinion of the respondents did not allow to meet a variety of needs. All respondents had no savings, but declared the debt of their holdings. Only in one case, they did not have either debt or savings. The average income of the entire household of the respondents ranged between 300 zł and 3000 zł, but in the latter case, the income per capita was only 500 zł, which entitled a household to take advantage of welfare benefits. In eight cases, the respondents lived in rural areas, in five - were residents of the city with a population of over 100 thousand residents. In six cases, the participants

in the study were single parents, and also in six - families with many children. Only in the case of one respondent had a university degree, but this did not translate into the achievement of higher income (average income in this farm was only 900 zł), nor to have employment. In four cases, the subjects had only primary education, in a gymnasium, and a four - vocational. Most respondents were women (11 people).

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Picture source: <http://pixabay.com/en/money-bills-calculator-save-256312/>

In the frame of TAP project, MITRA team with the help of volunteers have conducted interviews with two focus groups. First focus group consisted of 15 unemployed Estonians, from Estonian and Russian speaking linguistic communities. Interviewed people live in the capital city of Estonia-Tallinn and in Narva in the North-Eastern part of the country-the one that is severely affected by unemployment issue. In Estonia unemployment implicates hardship for those who are seeking but cannot find work.

The majority of this focus group cannot rely only on the state and the benefits paid by the institutions, but in many



Interview with unemployed Mihhail Petrov, interviewer Pavel Smulski

cases they can rely only on their family members that have stable income. Unemployment and its consequences are seen as a alarm of a national economic recession since 2008. While unemployment numbers have improved as the economy slowly recovers from the crisis, many people in their late twenties and fifties are still out of work. Interviewed people were discussing the role the government in solving the unemployed problems and also the so called "export of unemployment" phenomena. Some interviewed people were stating that "Estonia's biggest export to the Northern countries is unemployment."

In order to conduct the second round of interviews with the focus group that includes representatives of state institutions dealing with unemployment issues we have sent invitations to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Department of Social Security, Department of Unemployment, social commission of the Parliament and to two local municipalities. Surprisingly, we didn't get any response except answering machines that our requests were received. All officials we met face-to-face on December could not speak without permission of their bosses. On February we managed to make interviews with seven officials working for the unemployment agency, one member of Tallinn City Council, one trainer/teacher of the School of Economics and one psihologist who worked with unemployed people.

What we have learnt is that support services are failing to address complex issues of unemployed people in Estonia. On one hand, there are many low skilled jobs available on the market, that people refuse to take due to the extremely low wages, on the other hand there's a lack of specific skills by unemployed people to access better paid job. Officials have also mentioned that it's extremely difficult for their clients to get out of the vicious circle of living on the marge of the society because the problem of underemployment is one of the structural problems that affect Estonian society.

All 25 interviews were translated to English from Estonian and from Russian and uploaded on TAP project Admin system on February 27.



Interview with unemployed Malle Puusepp

While unemployment numbers have improved as the economy slowly recovers from the crisis, many people in their late twenties and fifties are still out of work.

From January to March Vol.To had been involved in the active phase of the project. Thank to the help of eight volunteering organisations dealing every day with social issues, we managed to deliver the interview developed within the TAP project to 15 people of the target 1. Moreover, thanks to our stakeholder network we manage to involve and interview 10 policies makers from the public and private sector.

At first overview we can underline how deep and serious was the impact of the financial crisis in our territory. Almost all the people interviewed declared to had have a better income condition before 2010. Work is a key issue, the majority of the people answered “find a work” to the question “what could improve your condition?”. But work has to

be produced, is a complex result of the efforts of public sector, private enterprise and individual initiatives. The needs of building a strong network between this three aspect is strategic point, emerging from the first analyses of the interviews conducted within the target 2 (policies makers).

Although the situation is still critic some good news comes from ISTAT the National Institute of Statistics, that published in November 2014 the report “Income and living conditions”. According to the result of the study in 2013, 28.4% of the Italian resident population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion, in accordance with to the definition adopted for the Europe 2020 Strategy. In comparison with 2012, the indicator decreases by 1.5 percentage points, as a consequence of the decrease of the share of population in severely materially deprived households (from 14.5% to 12.4%); the share of people at risk of poverty remain stable (19.1%), while that of people living in very low work intensity households increases slightly (from 10.3% to 11.0%). (source ISTAT).

Note: “At risk of poverty or social exclusion”: the indicator is the combination of the poverty risk (calculated on 2012 income), severe material deprivation and very low work intensity indicators. It corresponds to the share of population experimenting at least one of the above conditions.

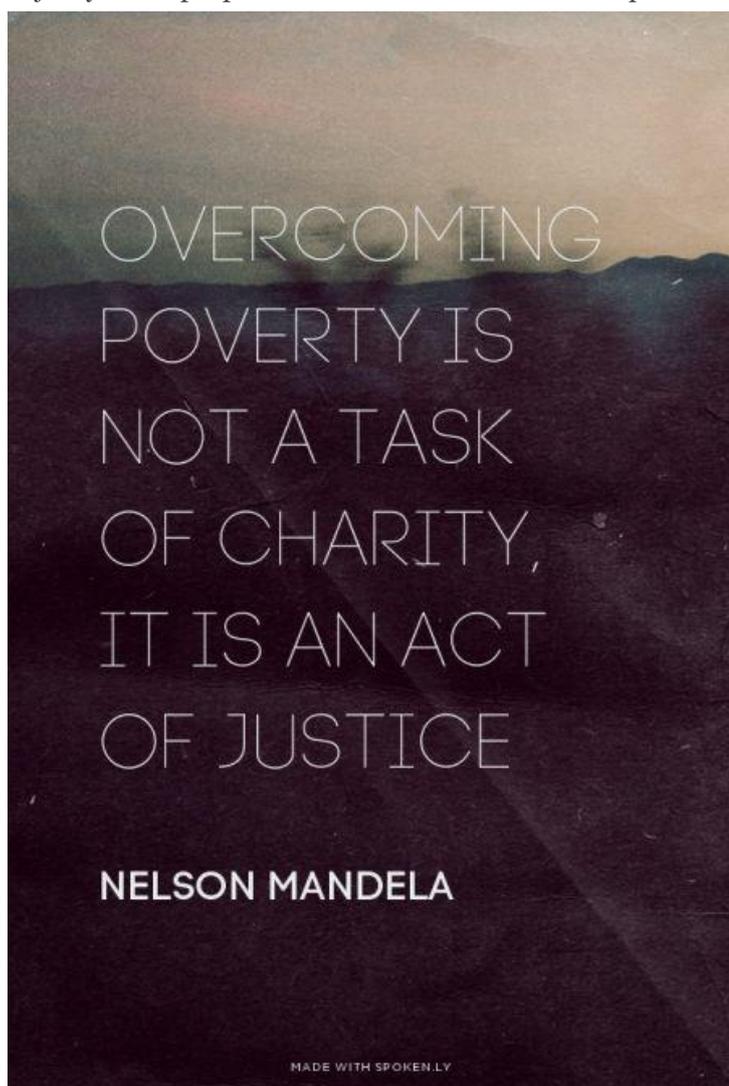


Photo source: <https://www.spoken.ly>

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The poorest target population of the Social Protection Service are the beneficiaries of the minimum guaranteed wages (MGW). These are people over 16 who are not in education, training or employment, and who are found able to work, but have not been able to find a job for a long time mostly because they lack the necessary basic skills and qualifications for the jobs on offer. Those who think they qualify for MGW submit their file (which needs over a dozen documents) to the SPS, which decides whether they do qualify for this support. Once the decision is made, another office subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly – called the County Agency for Social Payments and Inspection – is notified to make the payments. In addition, in Cluj-Napoca, based on a decision of the local administration, the beneficiaries of the MGW are also entitled to free meals provided by the Social Canteen.

In exchange for the MGW, the beneficiaries are obliged to do community work. The decision about what sort of community work to do is made by the Mayor's Office. In Cluj-Napoca, according to Mr Aurel Mocan, head of DASM, cited by [ziardecluj.ro](#) in its 14.08.2014 issue, there are around 140 MGW beneficiaries who are found able to do community. The jobs they are asked to do – generally, cleaning public spaces – require no qualifications. If an MGW beneficiary decides to attend a training course recommended by the SPS, the time spent in training counts towards the hours of community work.

Under the umbrella of the Direcția de Asistență Socială și Medicală [DASM – Social and Medical Assistance] in the municipality of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, the office which works with the poorest people is the so-called Social Protection Service (SPS). To learn about how the poorest people of the municipality are served by this public office, we looked into how the service operates and what is the vision of its chief-of-staff about what could be done better.



According to the chief officer of SPS, Ms Carmen Ciornei, it is worrying that in Cluj-Napoca there are now second generation beneficiaries of the MGW, which shows that in order to assist people to get out of poverty, comprehensive interventions are needed. Money on its own will not fix the problem. Education plays a key role, but short term, one-off training courses are not a solution. In addition to receiving the cash and free meals, each member of a poor family or household needs an educational intervention to increase their chances of finding a job and also for the younger generation to do well at school so that handing down the status of 'socially assisted' from parents to children is prevented. In Ms Ciornei's view, social work should mean working closely with the members of a household in extreme poverty to support them to gradually learn to value

work, learn how to manage their budget, gain self-esteem as members of the community and feel empowered to act as individuals who want to have a say in how their community evolves.

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Effective interventions that Ms Ciornei has in mind for the poorest families in Cluj-Napoca would be similar to the French model of tripartite social contract – a long standing agreement among representatives of the local government, of the socially assisted, and an expert who would serve as a group facilitator. In this model, selected individuals from among the beneficiaries of the solidarity income were empowered to work with the other poor in the community to decide on a form of social economy they would engage in capitalizing on the group's strength. Communication, collaboration, learning and dedication to supporting the poor in an empowering manner seem to be the key to solving the issue of poverty.



INITIAL SUMMARIZING OF RESEARCH RESULTS - POVERTY – THE NETHERLANDS

LEIDO is a national network that exists from 1999. It originated from the support of Dutch educational institutions in shaping studies combining work and learn. But then it has grown to a network that organizes around many themes activities linked to the design of 'lifelong learning'.

Seminars, conferences and other events are being organized for those within education institutions and associated organizations (labour market, politics, and administration) who are engaged in shaping policy and strategy.

Leido participates in national and international projects.

The Netherlands is seen by many countries as a country where the people have a good life, even if they find themselves in difficult circumstances. There is a good safety net before them, to help people if they are threatened to come in poverty and if they are facing to be put outside the community. Yet it is true that in the formal statistics about 11 percent of the Dutch population lives below the poverty line. This picture also emerges from the interviews held by Leido under the TAP project, with 16 people. These people are already in poverty or will it be soon if nothing happens, as a single person or as a household. Also, they are often in a situation to be seen as in social exclusion, but that is in the Netherlands in general not the case, as a small country with a lot of social control.

The experiences with authorities, municipalities and other organizations are in general okay and the willingness to support people (food bank, church, neighborhood teams and such organizations) is generally good. Officials are certainly willing to help, though the arrangements are not always adequate and procedures are sometimes very difficult to handle.

Among the 16 people were 4 men. It turns out that women have more chance to be in poverty, given the relations between men and women in the labor market. The level of training in general plays no role; anyone can get to deal with poverty and social exclusion.

People say that it also has to do with the own personality. A positive attitude, an approach that should lead to a better life, can help. They say they often - with debt that must be repaid (with the support of an organization) - are living in some kind of poverty, but that the future generally looks positive. Moreover, there is no difference between those who live in cities and rural people.

The income for a single person is around 900 euros when it comes to the assistance. For a family will that a few hundred euros more.

The interviews show that there is a lot of hidden poverty, so that it is not really visible to others. One tries to save himself, with the help of family and close friends. That works well in general.

GOOD, SUFFICIENT... BUT... WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BRING US?

In our research for the TAP-project we are asking people in the Netherlands about their situation, a specific one. They don't have so much money, no savings, and in most cases debts. But in general they are hopeful, satisfied with what the situation is. It is not good, just enough...but it could be worse.

This is due to the fact that one of the aspects of this 'judgement' is the way they are looking at the situation in other countries, like we also have in the project. Looking at the daily news and the documentaries on internet shows that a lot of people there have problems to survive. Comparing this with what is possible in the Netherlands gives them the feeling that poverty here is completely different from the same situation over there.

People are optimistic enough about what will happen in the years to come. Not everyone, but 'we have to make the best of it'. Looking at details, as we are doing during the interviews, we can see that the economic situation needs some fast improvement, to make their 'wishes' real.

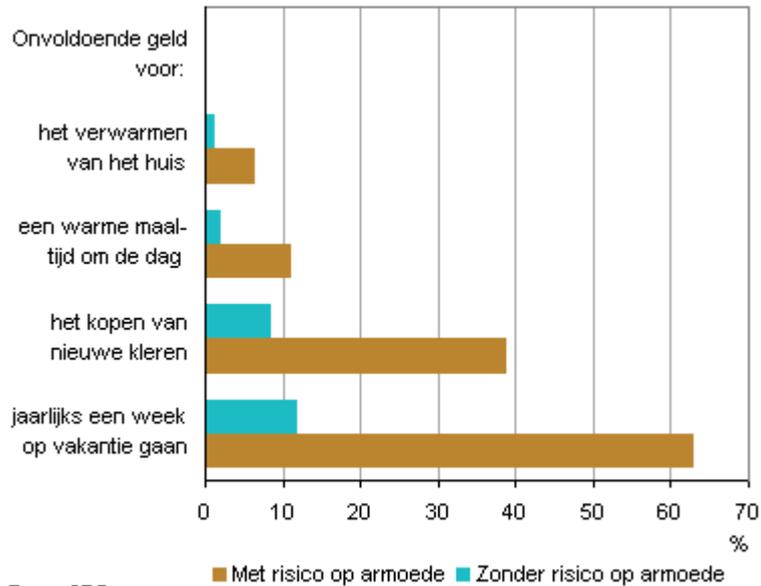
That is what we as Europe and member states have to fight for.

Here is some information about the situation for two groups:

Met risico op armoede = with risk on poverty

Zonder risico op armoede = without risk on poverty

Onvoldoende geld voor = Uninsufficient money for:



From top to bottom:

- Heating the house
- A warm meal every two days
- Buying new clothes
- A week on holiday, every week

Source: CBS, 2014