State and third sector institutions’ goals in dealing with problems of households living conditions – The case of Poland

MARZENA BREZA

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, WARSAW, Poland

The mandate for acting in the field of living conditions issues is given to the government and state agencies as well as to third sector institutions (called in Poland “social partners”).

The government is mainly formulating policy for social assistance, and at the same time is the key actor responsible for identifying social problems facing by families (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). State agencies on the central, regional and local levels are performing these functions on the basis of the state law. The performance of these tasks is complemented by third sector organizations, which are focused on a variety of social issues experienced by many Polish households.

The new era for Third Sector organizations in Poland has started after the economic transition in 1989. The open economy allowed global third sector institutions to act in Poland and there were a lot of nationally-based initiatives creating nonprofits organizations. The third sector institutions in the “new” European economies such like Poland are still new actors. They are involved in acting on many different levels. The main goal of non-profit organizations is to support populations affected by problems they can not deal with by themselves.

Many difficulties experienced by Polish households became pronounced as a result to the move to market economy (especially observed during the period of the economic transition – early 90s) (Beblo and Golinowska … 2002). Many of households were not really prepared for the new economic situation, and the first ‘lesson of the market economy’ in practice had for many very serious consequences, namely, loss of employment (Atkinson and Micklewright 1992).

Now the still changing environment of the labor-market affected by demographic changes and lately by the financial crisis intensified problems that exited before and caused new ones for many family households in Poland.

In the paper the main group of living conditions problems are defined as poverty (primarily child poverty), and persistency of material deprivation process, including rising social inequalities (mainly inequalities of income distribution).

The government social assistance policy enables financial and non-financial (e.g. benefits in kind) support for households’ members according to set (income) criteria. However the social reality is broader and those criteria do not fit some people in need. This makes an area of social activities for Third Sector institutions.

The object of this paper is to compare the government’s and the non-governmental organizations’ goals and targets groups. Furthermore, the paper distinguishes the different support methods applied by state agencies and NGOs in solving specific problems of inadequate housing conditions.

Specifically the paper asks the following research questions: what are the specific issues and methods of intervention of state and Third Sector activities for vulnerable families? What are the reasons for such specialization of activities – effectiveness, accessibility to support? What are the relations between state and third sector – compatibility or problem of overlapping actions?
The paper will attempt to answer the above questions based on statistical data (national - Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, GUS and international data sources as EUROSTAT, OECD, etc.). Using comparative methods of analysis the paper will identify the complementary and overlapping scope of action by the state and third sector institutions (also taking into account international experiences and good practices in this field). This should also allow to discover a type specialization for state and third sector activities for improving living conditions for these whose need support.

References


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