

Stimulating community-based care services in the Polish welfare system

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AGNIESZKA SOWA-KOFTA – EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK

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In 2018, the Polish government launched a pilot project to promote the provision of community-based care services for older and dependent people, by means of a programme targeted at people aged 75 or above. In 2019, it launched a complementary programme, targeting people with disabilities under the age of 75. Although their impact has been moderate so far, these programmes are important steps towards improving access to care services for the dependent population.

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Description

According to the 2004 Law on Social Assistance, care services remain the responsibility of the local social assistance centres (SAC). The SACs are financed by local communities. Services, covering various assistance and care tasks, may be granted to people requiring care due to age and/or disability. Although the provision of care services is a mandatory task of the SACs, in 2016 they covered only 1% of the older (60+) population, and almost 20% of local communities did not provide any care services (NIK 2018).

In 2018, given the growing care needs related to population ageing, the government launched a pilot project entitled "Care 75+" (Opieka 75+) (MRPiPS 2018a). The project aims at improving access to care, its quality and the quality of life of older people by helping local communities to provide community-based care services to people aged 75+. The programme is targeted at communities with fewer than 60 thousand inhabitants. A subsidy from the governmental budget, partially covering costs of services, is granted if the SAC provides care services (including specialised care, i.e. rehabilitation) using its own resources and employing carers on a full-time basis, without contracting out. The latter is perceived as lowering the quality of services. Financial support can be used to increase the number of services provided to clients already enrolled, or to newly enrolled clients. Co-funding cannot exceed 50% of the total cost of services. However, in the event of withdrawal of service provision, any

unused funds have to be returned. Regional authorities (voivodship) are responsible for the allocation of funds. In 2018, only older people living alone could be covered by the programme. As of 2019, the programme has been extended to older people living in families. Moreover, services covered by the programme can be provided not only by SACs, but also by social cooperatives (small enterprises which play an important role in work integration activities for groups at risk of social exclusion), if the cooperatives are contracted according to the public procurement law (MRPiPS 2018b).

In January 2019, the government launched a second programme: "Care services for people with disabilities" (Usługi opiekuńcze dla osób niepełnosprawnych), which targets people with disabilities under the age of 75. This initiative is specifically aimed at older people and complements that launched in 2018. Similarly to "Care 75+", a subsidy of up to 50% of the cost of services is granted to local communities, without restrictions related to the care provision (type of employment/contract, etc.). The programme is financed from the Solidarity Support Fund for People with Disabilities (Solidarnościowy Fundusz Wsparcia Osób Niepełnosprawnych), established in January 2019, and funded through deductions from the employers' contributions on wages paid into the Labour Fund (Fundusz Pracy) which finances public employment services.



Outlook and commentary

The "Care 75+" programme was part of the policy initiative established in 2018 under the headline "Social Policy Towards Older People 2030. Security – Participation – Solidarity" (Polityka społeczna wobec osób starszych 2030. Bezpieczeństwo – Uczestnictwo – Solidarność) (MRPiPS 2018c). This initiative highlights the need for the development of community-based care suited to the needs of older people, and enabling independent living for as long as possible. It is one of several initiatives undertaken by the government over the past few years to stimulate activity (e.g. the Senior+ programme supporting the establishment of activity centres for older people), and to boost the care of older and dependent people (e.g. meals on wheels). The programme is targeted at rural communities and small towns, where the population is ageing more rapidly than in more populated cities. In these communities, moreover, the provision of family care is undermined by migration outflow; the supply of private care providers is typically low and there is little scope for financing care from local government budgets.

The total number of care services' clients has been growing over the past years (5-6% annual increase). In 2018, care services reached 118.9 thousand people (MRPiPS 2014-2019).

In 2018, "Care 75+" reached 349 out of the 909 eligible local communities. The main impact of Care 75+ was in supporting communities that were already providing care services (331

communities), reducing the financial pressure on local governments by ensuring access to care. Only 18 communities launched new services under the programme.

So far, 320 local communities have applied for funds under the new programme "Care services for people with disabilities".

Both programmes are important mechanisms for increasing access to care services, despite the moderate impact they have had so far. One of the reasons for their low popularity among local governments could be lack of awareness, as the launch of the programmes was not preceded by an intensive information and promotion campaign. SACs might also have hesitated to sign up to the programmes due to the uncertain levels of funding, which depend on annual budget capabilities. The government plans to continue both programmes in the following years. The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy envisages to extend the "Care 75+" programme, enabling greater employment flexibility for professional carers who currently need to be in full-time employment. This may address the problem of poor supply of care workers, particularly in rural areas, where carers and nurses are difficult to contract full-time. Still, there are other problems related to the provision of care services that must be addressed to ensure their quality by establishing standards of care and quality monitoring. These have not yet been tackled.

Further reading

MRPiPS (2014-2019), MRPiPS-03 statistics, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/statystyki-pomocy-spoecznej>

MRPiPS (2018a), Program Opieka 75+ 2018 (zmiana) [Care 75+ programme 2018 (change)], Warsaw, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/program-opieka-75-edycja-2018>

MRPiPS (2018b), Program Opieka 75+ na rok 2019 [Care 75+ programme for the year 2019], Warsaw, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/program-opieka-75>

MRPiPS (2018c), Polityka społeczna wobec osób starszych 2030. Bezpieczeństwo – Uczestnictwo – Solidarność [Social Policy Towards Older People 2030. Security – Participation – Solidarity], Warsaw, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/polityka-spoeczna-wobec-osob-starszych-2030-bezpieczenstwo-uczestnictwo-solidarnosc>

NIK (2018), Usługi opiekuńcze świadczone osobom starszym w miejscu zamieszkania [Community-based care services provided to older people], Warsaw

Author

[Agnieszka Sowa-Kofta](#) (Institute of Labour and Social Studies)

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