

ACTIVE AGEING

VOLUNTARY WORK BY OLDER PEOPLE
IN EUROPE

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Older volunteers in Poland: the heritage of a Socialist regime

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Introduction

After 1989, Poland transitioned from a centrally planned economy (controlled and monitored by the state) to an economy with a substantial share of the private sector, before eventually becoming a member of the European Union (EU) in 2004. In line with other post-Socialist welfare states, Poland aimed its welfare regime system in the direction of a liberal-residual regime type, even though a clear type of welfare regime had not been fully developed (Ferge, 2001). As with other post-transitional European states, Poland is characterised by a mix of various social insurances, social assistance and privatisation and, more importantly, has experienced stronger economic development over the last few years, which has led to a higher level of social well-being than in the former countries of the USSR (Fenger, 2007).

Before the collapse of the Socialist regime in Poland, the dominant family model was the dual earner/female double burden model, characterised by high female employment and women taking full responsibility for house and care duties. This dual breadwinner household is still quite common today. New forms of households have since emerged, such as cohabitation and single young households or single parents (Slany, 2002). During the last two decades, Poland has grappled with the challenges of inflation, privatisation, unemployment and major system reforms. An ageing population and low activity rates among the older generations have presented minor problems for policy makers. Until recently, the pension system and extensive early retirement options, along with an eligible retirement age for women at 60 and for men at 65, have favoured early exit from the labour market. As a result, the employment rates for older generations are among the lowest in Europe. The same applies to participation by seniors in voluntary activity. And the fact that this generation grew

up and for most of their lives lived under a Socialist system is not to be overlooked.

The 1990s were a time of rebuilding civil society in Poland, both in the social self-consciousness and in the system regulations. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) offered support in areas where governmental policy and public institutions were ineffective. Since the 2000s it has been a time of professionalisation and stabilisation of the third sector. Nevertheless, the participation rates of Poles in voluntary activity are well below the European average. Depending on the definition of 'voluntary activity', it ranges from 6 per cent (ESS, 2008) to 12 per cent (Eurobarometer, 2011) to 16 per cent (Przewłocka, 2011) of the population. In 2010, there were about 60,000–65,000 active non-profit organisations. The total revenues reported in 2008 by all active associations, similar social organisations and foundations amounted to PLN 12.7 billion (about 3.1 billion), accounting for 1 per cent of Poland's gross domestic product (GDP) (GUS, 2010). Although there are legal regulations for voluntary work, it is still often provided in an informal way (without a contract with the non-governmental organisation [NGO] concerned or membership), particularly in smaller organisations or for short periods of time. Most voluntary work in Poland takes place in the areas of charity, religion, sport and education, making it difficult to recognise if an altruistic or self-centred type of volunteering prevails.

In this chapter we focus on the voluntary activity of the Polish 50+ generation, its conditions, limitations and opportunities. First, we present the country-specific tradition of the voluntary sector. Then we describe the dimensions of volunteering by providing some relevant facts and figures. We also identify the main opportunities and limitations for participation in the Polish voluntary sector by older people, before concluding with an analysis of how the supply of older candidates and the demands of civil society could be better matched.

The Polish tradition of voluntary action

The roots of modern Polish civil society institutions and voluntary activity can be found in the 19th century, when, under annexations by Prussia, Austria and Russia, voluntary associations substituted for non-existent national institutions, cultivating the Polish culture, tradition and identity (Bartkowski, 2003). After Poland gained independence in 1918, voluntary associations continued to develop, but the Second World War brought a halt to this process. After the war, the Soviets established a Communist government in Poland, and

the following decades were dominated by Socialist ideology. Most voluntary organisations were totally eliminated from social life or replaced by mass organisations (in practice, obligatory and under state control) that more often served political goals. Social activity became a tool of political control, and for half a century it was restricted and depreciated to the effect that it lost its meaning, becoming an opportunistic and *façade* routine. On the other hand, another kind of voluntary activity at that time operated primarily against the system, its rules and indoctrination. It was run unofficially, often in an illegal manner (for example, underground press, education, cultural activity, help for victims of repression, and illegal political organisations). The peak of this process was a mass social movement: the independent self-governing trade union Solidarity (1980–81), which quickly assembled 10 million members (more than 80 per cent of the workforce in Poland at the time) to become the biggest voluntary organisation in history.

At the beginning of its transformation from a Socialist to a democratic system in 1989–90, a ‘boom’ in citizens’ initiatives occurred in Poland. The 1990s were a period of development in the third sector, as well as gradual change(s) in people’s mentality. New voluntary organisations took care of areas where public institutions were helpless or ineffective. The early 2000s were characterised by professionalisation of the third sector, during which legal acts and adjustments laid the grounds for formalisation of the third sector and the foundations of intersectorial cooperation. A fundamental step was Polish accession to the EU in 2004, as EU priorities emphasised the role of the non-governmental sector and structural funds contributed to developing new opportunities for organisation and stabilisation in this area.

Compared to the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Polish third sector is currently considered to be strong. Nevertheless, some structural barriers remain, including very low voluntary activity among Poles, weak and limited social dialogue, insufficient collaboration between actors within the sector, and organisational inefficiency with ineffective and non-transparent management and financial unviability (Klon/Jawor, 2008; USAID, 2009).

Voluntary organisations use various sources for financing their activities. For many of them, a major source of funding is the European Structural Fund and international foundations. The NGO sector is also subsidised by the state through the Civil Initiatives Fund (*Fundusz Inicjatyw Obywatelskich*) that was established in 2005. Another source of funding is 1 per cent of the citizens’ personal income tax,

which citizens can decide to assign to any public benefit organisation. Fundraising, sponsors, private donors and membership fees play a minor role. Experts emphasise the economic weakness of the whole sector due to limited access to public funds and hence poor financial stability (Rymsza, 2008; Schimanek, 2011). Furthermore, sometimes decisions related to organisations depend on a single decision-maker, as local representatives who are responsible for meting out public funds for social activity (the financing system is still being improved in Poland). Due to all these factors, many organisations are normally unable to predict how their financial situation will look like in the next year or months, and whether they will get the necessary funding to run their projects. This makes it very difficult to draw up any development plan for the organisation over a longer time frame.

There is no clear perception of the role of volunteers among Polish NGOs (PTS, 2008; Turek and Perek-Białas, 2011). Even if the law provides a definition of 'volunteer' (see p 177), the distinction between paid staff, members, voluntary workers, other participants or activists engaged in the activity of an organisation is often unclear, particularly in younger and smaller organisations or those functioning on a small scale (that is, at a neighbourhood or local level). One of the reasons is the informal character of the relationships in NGOs and the reluctance towards unnecessary bureaucracy in order to emphasise that everyone may join the organisation. Older and bigger organisations more often employ regular paid staff, offering better and more stable working conditions, and mostly signing voluntary agreements with volunteers. Forms of voluntary cooperation are also very diverse. It is common that a person who has a paid contract with an NGO in one project or in the form of part-time work (it can even be a small remuneration) could additionally provide voluntary work in other activities (Herbst and Przewłocka, 2011). In 2008, according to some studies, 78 per cent of organisations used voluntary work, and about 56 per cent fully relied on voluntary work (Gumkowska and Herbst, 2008; Herbst and Przewłocka, 2011).

The legal framework

The legal regulations for volunteering and civil society organisations were implemented very late in Poland. During the 1990s, the NGOs' legal framework was complex and confusing, and the introduction of Poland's new constitution in 1997 did not regulate the sphere sufficiently and clearly, setting up only the general framework for non-profit activity. The first comprehensive general bill was enacted

in 2003: the Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism. Among other things, this defined the term 'volunteer', regulated the procedures for voluntary work, defined the status and principles for the functioning of NGOs, and provided new opportunities for the non-profit sector. It introduced the mechanism of the 1 per cent tax return to organisations mentioned above, and regulated relationships between the public sector and the third sector (Makowski, 2008). At the Polish government level, the third sector is represented by the Council of Public Benefit Activities (*Rada Działalności Pożytku Publicznego*), created in 2004.

According to the Law, a volunteer is an individual who provides his or her services voluntarily and without remuneration. Volunteers provide services based on an agreement with the institution that engages them. If the services provided by the volunteer are implemented over a period exceeding 30 days, a written volunteer agreement is required. For periods of less than 30 days, the volunteer can request a written agreement or written confirmation of the services provided. A volunteer with a formal arrangement is automatically covered by the general national healthcare insurance. If a volunteer provides work for a period of less than 30 days, the organisation is obliged to provide accident insurance.

So far, there are no specific legal regulations concerning older people's participation in voluntary activity.

The dimension of volunteer work

Until 2005-06, participation in voluntary activity in Poland has constantly increased, along with the development of the third sector. The following years (2007-09) brought, however, a drop in the number of volunteers (even though the number of organisations continued to increase). This was mainly a result of two linked processes: improvement in the labour market situation (employment rates significantly rose and unemployment fell), which helped people focus on their professional careers, and second, mass emigration of young Poles, who constituted a significant group of volunteers, to EU countries that opened up their labour markets. Nevertheless, in 2010 there was a slight increase of volunteering among the population (see also Figure 8.2 below).

Voluntary organisations

From 1989, the number of new third sector organisations formally registered in the official census (REGON) systematically increased each year, reaching 6,000 in 2000. It then stabilised at a level of about 4,000–5,000 new foundations and associations being established every year. Between 2005 and 2010, the number of third sector organisations increased by 22 per cent. Experts emphasise that in recent years the third sector in Poland has been stabilising, as evidenced by the increasing number of organisations that have been established for more than five years (Herbst and Przewłocka, 2011; GUS, 2012b).

In 2010, about 12,000 foundations and 71,000 associations were formally registered in Poland (excluding 16,000 Volunteer Fire Brigades, which possess the legal form of association but in practice operate on a different basis). However, recent studies have shown that about 25 per cent of these organisations are not functional (Herbst and Przewłocka, 2011). Therefore, the number of active organisations should be estimated at a level of about 60,000–65,000.

The most often declared fields of activity, as indicated by 53 per cent of the investigated organisations (Figure 8.1), were sport, tourism, recreation and hobbies. Next in line were education (47 per cent), culture and art (31 per cent), health services (19 per cent), and social services and social help (17 per cent).

The majority comprise small and medium-size organisations in terms of people being employed or involved in the organisation. Half of all associations have fewer than 35 members and only 16 per cent have more than 100 (Herbst and Przewłocka, 2011). However, only half of the formal members are considered to be fully active, and about 30 per cent of members are fully inactive (Gumkowska and Herbst, 2008). There is also significant inequality in the distribution of resources within this sector: 10 per cent of the biggest organisations accumulated 88 per cent of the total financial resources of the sector. The majority of NGOs are located in cities (64 per cent), particularly in Warsaw and other major cities (GUS, 2010).

Almost half of organisations employed a paid staff, 24 per cent had regular employees and 20 per cent had occasional employees hired through short-term contracts. The proportion of employees increases with the organisation's age and scope of activity. More than 60 per cent of the youngest NGOs, functioning for less than five years, do not employ any paid staff. The same applies to more than two thirds of organisations functioning in the local area, while among regional

**Figure 8.1: Main fields of organisation's activity in 2010
(excluding fire brigades and religious organisations)**



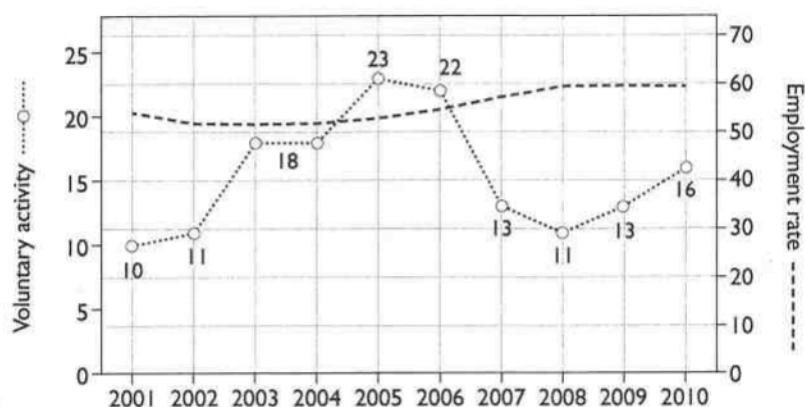
Source: based on data from Herbst and Przewłocka (2011)

or countrywide NGOs, half could afford to hire their own employees (Herbst and Przewłocka, 2011).

Volunteers by sector, gender and age

According to the European Social Survey (ESS) (2008), only 6 per cent of the Polish population aged 18–59/64 volunteered (in the last month), which was far below the European average (11 per cent). The more recent national research by Klon/Jawor (Baczko and Ogrodzka, 2008; Przewłocka, 2011) estimated that 16 per cent of Poles aged 15+ were engaged in voluntary activity in 2010 (that is, in carrying out social work for free in an NGO, social or religious movement; see Figure 8.2). This represents a significant increase compared to the

Figure 8.2: Volunteers in the third sector (population aged 15+) and employment rate (population aged 15-64) (%)



Source: Baczek and Ogrodzka (2008); Eurostat (2010); Przewłocka (2011)

previous three years, although it remains lower compared to the peak reached between 2003 and 2006.

For the last few years, the highest participation rates (of volunteers and members) have occurred in charitable, religious, sport and educational organisations (Baczek and Ogrodzka, 2008). In 2011, 60 per cent of NGOs members were men; however, women accounted for 59 per cent of volunteers and 60 per cent of NGO employees. The highest share of women volunteers (74–80 per cent) was observed in organisations operating in the fields of health, social services and education, with the lowest in sport and tourism (GUS, 2010).

In the under-25-year-old group, 22 per cent were volunteers (among pupils and students it was 29 per cent), and in the group aged 36 to 45, about 19 per cent (see Table 8.1). The lowest share was among older people (10 per cent for the group aged 55+) and pensioners (7 per cent). People with a higher education were involved in NGOs much more often (28 per cent) than other education-level groups (13–14 per cent).

Out of the 16 per cent who were involved in volunteering in 2010, only a small proportion did it on a regular basis, while the majority participated occasionally or even only once (Przewłocka, 2011). This is reflected in the time devoted to volunteering in the previous 12 months: only 5 per cent volunteered more than 150 hours yearly in total (on average three hours per week), while more than half provided less than 15 hours during the whole year.

Table 8.1: Proportion of volunteers by level of education, age and work status

	Characteristics	Share of volunteers (%)
Education	Lower	13
	Lower vocational	13
	Secondary	14
	Higher	28
Age	25 and less	22
	26-35	14
	36-45	19
	46-55	17
	55 and more	10
Work status	Employed	18
	Unemployed	13
	Retired/disabled	7
	Student/pupil	29
	Inactive/taking care of home	11

Source: Przewłocka (2011)

Based on the above statistics, in Poland volunteering is more popular among younger people (particularly pupils and students), and among working middle-aged people with a higher education (Przewłocka, 2011). Non-profit engagement is often considered an important part of career paths, and highly valued by employers. It is an especially important experience for younger people, who are in the first steps of their professional career (Makowski and Schimanek, 2008). Additionally, students and pupils have more time for participation. More often than other groups, they engage in broad nationwide initiatives, as well as in activity aimed at the ecology, environment and animal protection (Przewłocka, 2011). Young and middle-aged men also dominate sporting and tourist organisations.

Participation of older volunteers

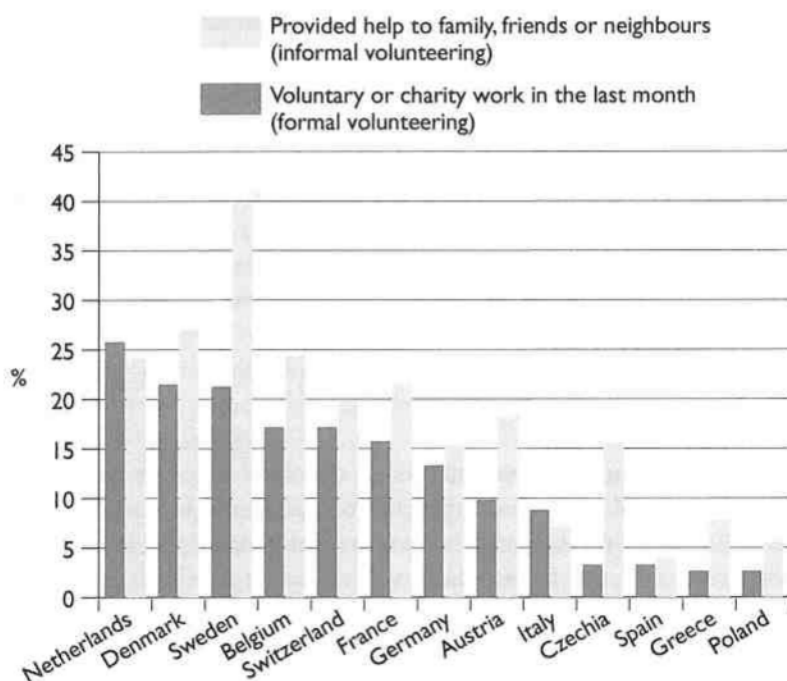
With the exception of volunteers in the care sector, it is hard to sketch the profile of a 'prototypical' Polish older volunteer, as there are not many of them. Statistical data are not very helpful in this case. Based on qualitative studies, however, we may specify the main and most common types of activities among older volunteers in Poland (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2005; Rosochacka-Gmitrzak, 2011; Turek and Perek-Białas, 2011; Pazderski and Sobieszak-Penszko, 2012). Older volunteers are active in and for local communities, participate in

educational projects aimed at improving their skills and competences, take part in health and recreational activities, as well as in integrative (cultural) projects in which they work with younger generations or share their knowledge, experiences and memories.

At the *individual level*, the third sector presents itself poorly when it comes to older Poles. Poland has one of the lowest voluntary activity rates among the 50+ in Europe. According to SHARE data (Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe), in 2006-07 (see Figure 8.3), only 2 per cent of the Polish 50+ 'formally' volunteered (that is, did voluntary or charity work in the last month), and 5 per cent 'informally' volunteered (provided help to family, friends or neighbours in the last month).¹

Table 8.2 shows the level of participation among older Poles in volunteering according to different sources. In 2010, almost 10 per cent of the 55+ could be classified as being active in voluntary organisations (including religious ones) during the previous year (Przewłocka, 2011), while in the 46-55 age group, 17 per cent of

Figure 8.3: Voluntary or charity work (formal volunteering) and providing help to family, friends or neighbours (informal volunteering) in the last month (% of adults 50+)



Source: SHARE (2006-07)

Table 8.2: Voluntary activity of seniors in Poland by data sources

Type of activity	%	Age group	Year of research	Source
Voluntary work for organisation (currently)	12.0	55+	2011	Eurobarometer
Voluntary activity in non-profit (including religious) organisation last year	17.0	46-55	2010	Klon/Jawor
Voluntary activity in non-profit (including religious) organisation last year	10.0	55+	2010	Klon/Jawor
Voluntary work last month	5.2	50+	2008	ESS
Active voluntary involvement in work of social or political organisation last year	7.0	60+	2007	CBOS
Voluntary or charity work last month (formal volunteering)	2.0	50+	2006-07	SHARE
Help to family, friends or neighbours last month (informal volunteering)	4.7	50+	2006-07	SHARE
Involvement in religious organisation last month	9.8	50+	2006-07	SHARE
Involvement in political organisation last month	1.8	50+	2006-07	SHARE

Sources: SHARE (2006-07); ESS (2008); CBOS (2010); Eurobarometer (2011); Przewłocka (2011)

Poles were active. A similar picture is presented in the Eurobarometer data for 2011 (12 per cent of volunteers aged 55+).

The ESS (2008) shows that about 5 per cent of the 50+ population volunteered (in the last month), which is consistent with SHARE results and places Poland well below the European average. It should be underlined, however, that despite the generally high sense of being religious, 90 per cent of 50+ Poles did not declare any activity in religious organisations (SHARE, 2006-07).

The national representative survey of CBOS (2010) reports that as many as 86 per cent of people aged 60 or older were not interested in any activity within their own close environment, municipality or parish. At the same time, only 7 per cent admitted to having been actively involved in voluntary work for a social or political organisation in 2007.

According to the SHARE study for Poland (2006-07), the reasons for voluntary activity among Poles aged 50+ are mostly related to the need to do something useful (for 81 per cent of respondents) and the opportunity to meet other people (47 per cent). For almost one in ten, it was an almost daily activity, whereas more than 60 per cent worked voluntarily or charitably less than once a week. Older Polish volunteers were usually those who had been active in the social

domain throughout their lives (Turek and Perek-Białas, 2011). They also differ in their motivation from younger people, who tend to treat volunteering as an initial period of their career and a source of work experience. For seniors, volunteering is a way of being active and filling their time, an opportunity to work for and with people. In many cases, it is a form of repayment to others and to society. Senior volunteering is an expression of maturity when the roles of parent, grandparent and spouse have been fulfilled, making it possible for free time to be spent on social activity (Bogacz-Wojtanowska and Rymśa, 2009).

At the *organisational level*, the situation for older volunteers in the third sector has improved in recent years, mainly due to legal regulations and accession to the EU. Organisations have finally been given clear guidelines for operating and financing, as well as a significant inflow of funds from the EU. These processes have fostered the progress of the sector and promoted new activities, including those aimed at seniors.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Polish NGOs aimed at older volunteers. There are many organisations – about 1,300 (Dudkiewicz and Sobiesiak-Penszo, 2011) – that provide help and support to older people, mitigating the results of unemployment and exclusion, even though they do not address the activation of people aged 50+ directly. The involvement of seniors in the third sector has actually begun to develop in the last decade, although some isolated organisations aimed at activating older people have been operating for 20 years or longer. One of the first platforms for assembling non-profit organisations for seniors was established in 2004: *Forum 50+ Seniors of the 21st Century*. It is comprised of 22 organisations, mostly small or medium-sized, operating mainly in the fields of social services, education, health and recreation. Another example is a programme supporting and financing initiatives for the activation of the older generations, *Seniors in Action*, that until 2011 awarded 133 projects for activating people aged 50+ (it is run by the Association of Creative Initiatives 'e', thanks to funding from the Polish-American Freedom Foundation). Despite the large number, the awarded projects were mainly small and could not contribute to the fast and significant development of volunteering in older age in Poland.

A particularly successful example of organisations engaging older people in recent years has been Third Age Universities (Halicka and Kramkowska, 2011), which provide a place for spending leisure time rather than just a place for developing and improving professional

skills. There are currently about 385 universities of this kind in Poland, bringing together more than 100,000 participants (data from the Congress of Third Age Universities in 2012). It is worth mentioning that the biggest and oldest seniors' organisation in Poland, with a 70-year-long tradition and almost one million formal members, is the Polish Association of Retired Persons, Pensioners and the Disabled, which acts for the improvement of life conditions for older and disabled people and represents them at governmental level.

The most active senior organisations are mainly established in Poland's major cities, with small towns and the countryside being areas where voluntary activity is still rare. The gap is partly filled by traditional forms of activities, such as country Housewives' Circles, Voluntary Fire Brigades and religious organisations, but the level of involvement of older people in these organisations is hard to estimate (Kamiński, 2008).

Older people's participation in voluntary organisations: opportunities and restrictions

Although a third sector focusing on seniors is slowly developing in Poland, participation of older volunteers remains very low. Let us now consider the opportunities and restrictions in terms of their activation, as well as the impact of an increasingly older workforce and of family care duties, on the contribution of older people to civil society.

Opportunities and restrictions for volunteering for older people

The low participation of Poland's older people in volunteering can be explained by a few factors. At the individual level, we may recognise a *problem of mentality* and of *life situation*. At the organisational and institutional levels, we observe a *problem of limited possibilities* for their involvement in civil society.

The first *problem of mentality* is a subjective barrier that can only be resolved with the help of seniors themselves. The Socialist period had a significant impact on the awareness of older generations. The degeneration of the public sphere and imposition of ideological definitions of 'volunteering', 'common wealth' and 'social activity' have increased their reluctance to belong to any association or organisation (Synak, 2000). The dominant image of older age contradicts active attitudes, as it is perceived as the time of retirement, inflexibility and aversion towards updating or changing skills (Bogacz-Wojtanowska and Rymśa, 2009). The willingness to be active and the awareness of

one's own capabilities are fundamental and necessary elements in the process of active ageing. Activity is still not widely seen as necessary for maintaining a good physical and mental condition, and retirement is treated as a moment of 'deserved rest' or a safe solution amidst unstable labour market conditions with limited possibilities for finding a new job (MPiPS, 2008).

The second problem at the individual level is related to the *life situation* of Polish seniors, primarily in financial and health terms. The dysfunctions in the health and social care systems are considered to be relevant obstacles for activation (Turek and Perek-Białas, 2011). Many older Poles have too many everyday life obligations (also within the family) and worries to find the time and energy for voluntary activity. Pension benefits are often fairly low (the average retirement pension was about 380 per month in 2010, with the minimum wage at 315; GUS, 2012a). Nevertheless, the financial situation of older Poles is very differentiated and generally not as bad as it is often perceived by the media and public opinion (the poverty rate – below 60 per cent of the median equivalent income after social transfers – for people aged 65 or more in Poland was lower than the European average; Eurostat, 2012). Additionally, working in NGOs sometimes offers the possibility of additional earning. This is actually moving away from the strict concept of volunteering as an activity that is provided for free, but is sometimes what happens *de facto* in Poland.

At the organisational level, the third sector is a unique area that may provide many opportunities for the activation of older people in different ways from the profit sector, and there have already been some steps in this direction (see pp 184–185). Certainly, its significant strengths are flexible patterns of employment and voluntary engagement (Bogacz-Wojtanowska and Rymśa, 2009). We should remember that NGOs may well be a place of paid work for seniors. Although this is no longer a voluntary activity, it is particularly important from the perspective of activating older people, and it is often impossible to separate these two dimensions. In the Polish third sector, paid workers would also usually involve themselves in voluntary activity. NGOs may provide better working conditions compared to companies (except for the pay), for example, a friendly atmosphere, the possibility of reconciling work and private life (including care responsibilities), help in difficult life situations, as well as an opportunity to provide useful and important work. For seniors, being active in NGOs is a way of living, spending leisure time, self-development through work, as well as having the chance for small additional earnings (Bogacz-Wojtanowska and Rymśa, 2009).

On the other hand, both at the organisational and institutional level, it has been recognised that one of the most important barriers is the *problem of limited possibilities* for activation in older age. There are still not many NGOs that are able to meet the needs and aspirations of older volunteers, and most of them are focused on big cities. Even more generally, seniors in Poland are often considered as passive objects of help and care, rather than as active participants (Szatur-Jaworska, 2000; Błędowski, 2002). Another problem is the lack of knowledge about volunteering among older generations and the possibilities of staying active after retirement (Turek and Perek-Białas, 2011). Nevertheless, much has changed during the last two decades since the transition. During the 1990s, the third sector actually had nothing to offer to older volunteers. But a growing awareness of the challenges posed by an ageing society has resulted in increasing concerns about the activation of older generations. The media are now more frequently showing older people being active and full of energy. After accession to the EU and the European Years of Volunteering (2011) and Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity (2012), seniors are today recognised as a large group of potential participants in civil society by NGOs and, as already mentioned, more visible and real possibilities of participation and NGO initiatives are becoming available to them.

On the other hand, the activity of the third sector in this field has still not gained any institutional or systematic support from national government. There is no real public policy towards older volunteers or support for NGOs focusing on older people in Poland, although some recent strategic documents have considered this issue (Pazderski and Sobieszak-Penszko, 2012). Public policy addressing the challenges of an ageing society in Poland during the last two decades has focused on the financial aspects of demographic change, pension system reform, limitation of early retirement and increasing eligible retirement age. The main programme from 2008 on the challenges of ageing, 'Solidarity across Generations', was also focused on productivity and employment rather than on a more broad approach to active ageing.

Older people between employment and volunteering

The employment rates of older people in Poland are among the lowest in the EU, reaching in 2011 in the group aged 50–64 57 per cent for men and 41 per cent for women. In the 65+ age group, it was 8 and 3 per cent respectively (Eurostat, 2011). The effective average age of people who for the first time received pension benefits in 2010 was 59.0 years for women and 60.2 years for men (ZUS, 2011).

Poland may be described as a 'medium' work-oriented country from a comparative perspective. The proportion of people aged 50–65 who would have decided to work, even if they did not need the money, amounted to 68 per cent in 1997, while the average for the countries covered in this study was 61 per cent (ISSP, 1997). In 2008, about 66 per cent of people in the same age range would have chosen to work even if they were quite affluent (PGSS, 2008).

Low employment rates combined with low voluntary activity rates among seniors make the analytical attempt at reconciling professional and voluntary work very limited and not so clear. According to the ESS (2008), the percentage of people aged 50–60 who are volunteers but who also work totalled 4.5 per cent, decreasing to less than 1 per cent after the age of 60. According to the SHARE 2006–07 data, among Polish volunteers aged 50+ ($n=46$), more than one third are employed or self-employed, 43 per cent are retired, 9 per cent are looking for work and 9 per cent declare themselves to be permanently sick or disabled (the low number of cases limits the analysis, however, and any interpretations must be used with caution). The relatively frequent conjunction of profit and non-profit work is, however, not really related to employee volunteer programmes provided by companies, as such initiatives are still very rare in Poland (Centrum Wolontariatu, 2008).

There is currently almost no discussion about the impacts of an increasingly older workforce on the contribution of older people to civil society. The marginal share of older volunteers means that the third sector is still not considered an important field of activity in older age by policy makers and civil society in general.

Older people between family care and volunteering

It is often stressed that the traditional model of family, where the care of older relatives is considered an obligation, is strongly embedded in Polish mentality and reality (Kotowska and Wóycicka, 2008). Family in Poland is seen as the main care supplier – about 60 per cent of Poles consider that older people requiring care or support should live with one of their children (Eurobarometer 2007). Institutionalised care is usually valued negatively and not readily available (Synak, 2000; Raclaw, 2011). In comparison to the rest of Europe, Poland has one of the lowest levels of formal care provisions: residential care covers only 1 per cent of the population aged 65+ and formal home care 1.7 per cent; it is, however, compensated for by a high informal involvement of family caregivers (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2012).

In 2008 (Kotowska and Wóycicka, 2008), 31 per cent of women aged 50–65 and 20 per cent of men aged 55–70 were caregivers (providing regular and free care to adults or children). The Central Statistical Office (GUS) data for 2005 showed that the percentage of people providing care to a person aged 60 or more increased significantly among older generations, reaching, in the 55–64 age group, about 10 per cent for men and almost 20 per cent for women.

According to SHARE (2006–07), however, the numbers are much lower. Only 3.7 per cent ($n=101$) of the 50+ population cared for a sick or disabled adult in the previous month (the second lowest result among the 13 European countries in the SHARE project). This can partly be explained by a possibly slightly narrower definition of caregiver by the SHARE study, and the time restriction to within the last month. A marginal number (26 per cent) of caregivers provided additional help to family, friends and neighbours, as well as voluntary or charitable work. For the 50+, care responsibilities implied significant limitations in everyday life, causing tiredness, sadness or helplessness, a situation certainly not conducive to voluntary activity (Principi and Perek-Białas, 2011).

The lack of appropriate data prevents a more precise analysis of the relation between family care and volunteering; however, caregiving itself can be considered in two ways. On the one hand, care duties seem to be an obstacle and limitation to voluntary activation. On the other hand, care for family members can be considered a kind of voluntary and unpaid work, provided on the basis of a personal (and not institutional) relationship.

Improving the match between supply of older candidates with the demand of voluntary organisations: future perspectives

Despite the current low volunteering rate among older people, after two decades of transition, the third sector in Poland is increasingly offering a relatively broad range of opportunities for activity among seniors. Recent organisational initiatives show that there is room for older volunteers and an interest in their work. Volunteering can serve as a tool for the activation of retired people. As emphasised by Schimanek (2006), there are no legal or formal restrictions limiting the access of older people to the third sector.

Therefore, the fundamental elements are ambition and willingness among seniors themselves, even though they need to meet a responsive environment for activity in terms of public policy, institutions and

NGOs. The success of senior initiatives is usually related to the determination, hard work and vision of single individuals – local leaders – who are able to assemble a team and motivate them to work. Still, there are not enough systematic solutions aimed at activating older volunteers so as to make them a significant and solid element of the third sector. The crucial challenge is, on the one hand, to positively change attitudes towards the prolongation of active life and lifelong learning and, on the other, to break those (sometimes unfounded) stereotypes about older people (Dudkiewicz and Sobiesiak-Penszko, 2011; Schimanek, 2011).

Against the growing interest observed at the organisational (or meso) level, current governmental public policy and public debate seem to omit or marginalise this specific type of activation in terms of voluntary work, concentrating first on the activation of inactive people in the labour market and on prolonging professional work. As the reasons for inactivity and the conditions for profit and non-profit activation seem to be basically the same, the solutions and propositions relative to the labour market might soon have an impact on the situation in the third sector as well. Public policy focusing on ageing and older generations is still an issue for the future in Poland, given that the existing solutions have mainly protective characteristics in the attempt to secure employment in older age.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the phenomenon of volunteering in older age in Poland at an individual, organisational and public policy level. The voluntary activity rate of seniors in Poland is among the lowest in Europe, for reasons that are quite different compared to young generations. First, they result from history, tradition and culture, as people aged 50+ lived for at least 30 years under a Socialist regime. This heritage is something that should not be underestimated, and can still be observed at the individual level: general inactivity, demanding attitudes, reluctance to do or lack of knowledge about voluntary work, and a distorted notion of volunteering due to the Socialist ideology. The predominant view of older age in the public opinion is far from an active image. It is rather a specific culture of inactivity in which senior volunteering does not exist. Older people are considered rather more often as passive objects of help and care than as active participants. A secondary factor is the current socio-economic conditions and life situation, which, for at least a significant proportion of older Poles, remain difficult. At the organisational level, we may reiterate the

problem of limited possibilities. The third sector for seniors, consisting of NGOs that are able to meet the needs and aspirations of older volunteers, is still very small. Nevertheless, for a few years now, it has been developing, albeit slowly, and NGOs are the only actors that actually attempt to engage older people in volunteering. Public policy, however, does not support this form of activity in an effective way. For the last two decades, it has focused on the financial aspects of demographic changes and pension system reform. Policy makers still do not consider the third sector an important field of activity in older age.

Until recently, what NGOs had to offer to older people, apart from isolated examples of good initiatives, was rather narrow and focused more on big cities. It amounted to single initiatives by local leaders, but lacked systematic and broader actions. Recently, however, the situation has changed. Professionalisation and stabilisation of the third sector, EU priorities and funds, the media and a growing awareness of the challenges posed by an ageing society, have resulted in an increasing concern about the need for more active older people in the voluntary field. It is difficult to predict whether an increasing commitment by the labour market may phase in or crowd out older Poles from volunteering. The current older people's extremely low rates in both activities may suggest that the relationship between the two activities may not be wholly negative. On the other hand, informal family care may undermine volunteering by older people, and especially for women, since the family in Poland is still considered the principal care supplier. All this requires extensive reflection among all concerned parties in Poland, where there has so far been very little discussion about the consequences of an ageing population on the contribution of older people to civil society.

Note

¹ The terms 'formal' and 'informal volunteering' were defined in the SHARE documents and used in the analysis of SHARE data by Hank and Erlinghagen (2008).

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