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Social assistance expenditure of cities with district rights in Poland in the context of their financial abilities and the needs of the inhabitants

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SOCIAL ASSISTANCE EXPENDITURE OF CITIES WITH DISTRICT RIGHTS IN POLAND IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIRS FINANCIAL ABILITIES AND THE NEEDS OF THE INHABITANTS

Summary

Social assistance system in Poland was redesigned in the years 2004–2006 and, according to the promoted strategies of reduction of the welfare state, was based on decentralization. Local self-government took over a large number of responsibilities from the state but did not obtain adequate financial sources. While its revenue is considerably varied on the territory of Poland and closely related with local economic base, there is a risk that because of the poverty of local self-government substantial needs of its inhabitants will not be satisfied. The main aim of the thesis is to analyze if and how the richness of self-government influences the level of social benefits for the members of the local community.

Keywords: local self-government expenditure, social assistance, poverty

Introduction

The social assistance system in Poland has undergone a significant evolution in the last quarter of a century. The creation of its fundamentals in the beginning of the 90's was based on the concept of, decentralization already widespread in the countries of Western Europe, and many of the most significant

tasks related to social assistance were transferred to the local self-government units in accordance with the assumption that being closer to the citizens they will recognize their needs better and cater to a wider range of them incurring lower costs¹. The system solutions adopted in Poland in the field of social assistance tend to prompt wondering whether the transfer of a very large number of tasks in this field to the local government units does not affect the level of satisfaction of the needs of local communities. Most of them are own tasks, including those made compulsory and financed from the budget of the entity. In a situation where the revenue level of local governments in the state is highly diversified and largely dependent on the income of natural and legal persons in the unit (own revenues at all levels of local government are based on the revenues from income taxes) and is only partially compensated by transfers from the state budget, there is a risk that the needy people will be deprived of help or will obtain it only in a narrow range. Local governments in Poland receive funds from the state budget for the completion of a part of the social assistance tasks. The range and standard of the implementation of the remaining ones depends crucially on the financial capacity of the entity and on the identified needs of its residents. In consequence it is a resultant of a few factors, out of which the ones of crucial importance are the following: the number of people eligible for social assistance benefits in the local government unit, the level of their poverty (or other factors determining the amount of the indemnity), reliability demonstrated by social employees assessing the scope of the needs of the local community and the financial ability of the self-government unit. The more freedom the local governments have in deciding whether, how and how much help to provide, the greater the risk that it will limit the expenditure in this area, especially when they lack the resources for other important tasks. A similar negative result might occur if the demand for social services in the area is high and, consequently, support for a specific person small. It is therefore extremely important and interesting to investigate how the level of expenditure on aid and social policies borne by the local government in different parts of Poland is formed and how it

¹ See e.g.: J. Krzyszkowski, *Między państwem opiekuńczym a opiekuńczym społeczeństwem. Determinanty funkcjonowania środowiskowej pomocy społecznej na poziomie lokalnym*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2010, s. 146; P. Smoke, *Fiscal Decentralization in Developing Countries. A Review of Current Concepts and Practice*, UNRISD, Switzerland 2001, s. 16 i n.

is related to the scale of poverty in the population living there and the richness of local government.

Geography of welfare expenditure (including the issue of decentralization of social assistance tasks) is attracting more and more attention; still it has not been discussed broadly enough yet. To date, in Poland the disparities of social assistance expenditure of the local self-government have not been the subject of deeper scientific researches. But the issue of diversity of local expenses in this field and its determinants was considered on the example of Norwegian municipalities and brought to important conclusions that should be confronted with experiences of local government units in other countries². Nowadays, in literature it is emphasized that decentralization of social policy may have also negative effect on social entitlements and some redistributive mechanisms may be provided only on the national level³. They also underline the problem of resources for financing this type of tasks on the local level of governance. According to Smokes the lack of balance between revenue sources (including transfers) and the increases in service functions assigned to them are the major constraints of further expansion of local services⁴. Researches that focus on providing social assistance by the local self-government confirm that the more autonomous in conducting social policy the local authorities are the more social services and benefits differ across the country and that their decisions are determined by a wide range of factors dependent and independent from local self-government⁵. There is a risk that without the guidelines and the criteria that set parameters for local discretion, achieving consistency of purpose and approach in social policy across the country would be extremely.

The main aim of the thesis is to analyze if and how the richness of self-government influences the level of social benefits for the members of the local community. In order to investigate the relationship the share of beneficiaries

² S. Lien, P.A. Pettersen, *Local Government and Welfare Generosity: Municipality Spending on Social Welfare*, „Scandinavian Studies” 2004, no. 27 (4), s. 343–365.

³ L. Bifulco, M. Bricocoli, M.R. Monteleone, *Activation and Local Welfare in Italy: Trends and issues*, „Journal Compilation” 2008, no. 42, s. 143–159.

⁴ P. Smoke, *Fiscal Decentralization...*, s.11 i n.

⁵ D. Rauch, *Central versus Local Service Regulation: Accounting for Diverging Old-age Care Developments in Sweden and Denmark, 1980–2000*, „Social Policy and Administration” 2008, no. 42 (3), s. 267–287; C. Hamnett, *Special Division of Welfare: The Geography of Welfare Benefit Expenditure and of Housing Benefit in Britain*, „Regional Studies” 2009, no. 43 (8), s. 1015–1033. M. Craw, *Deciding to Provide: Local Decisions on Providing Social Welfare*, „American Journal of Political Science” 2010, no. 54 (4), s. 906–920.

who were granted the social assistance in number of inhabitants of a city between the self-government's spending on assistance and social policy and the needs of local communities to benefit in this regard and the financial possibilities of individual self-governments the analysis included data describing all i.e. 65 cities with district rights in Poland – a peculiar type of units which perform the tasks of municipalities and districts at the same time in the discussed field. The fact that the data referring to poverty in Poland are collected only on the level of provinces and there is no comprehensive information depicting the rate of this phenomenon on lower levels of the territorial division in the whole country determined the method of conducting the analysis and the details of discussion. To specify the level of needs of the society two coefficients were used – the share of benefit recipients in the total population of the city with district rights (instead of the range of statutory poverty in a city) and the factor affecting poverty at most – the unemployment. The level of self-government's resourcefulness was assessed *per capita* into account being taken two factors: total revenues (including, among others, transfers from the state budget subsidy and grants transferred for a specific purpose) and much more diverse in the case of individual units own revenues of local government which are the main source of funding for their own tasks. To ensure comparability of data across the country also the volume of cities with district rights spending on assistance and social policy was divided by the number of its inhabitants. The analysis also included the expenditures allocated by the self-governments in the cities with district rights to: 1) benefits whose grant and height depends on the competent authority of the self-government but essentially their implementation falls within the scope of mandatory tasks of self-government, 2) benefits, which are financed by the government fully on a facultative basis. The research was based on the data collected in 2012 which are obligatorily sent by each unit of local self-government in the country and stored by public institutions – Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and on the Central Statistical Office data.

1. The position of cities with district rights in the system of social assistance in Poland

Currently, for social assistance in Poland both the state administration and self-governments are responsible, but the burden of implementation and financing of the majority of tasks rests mainly on municipalities and districts. The substantial part of their duties in the field of social assistance are own tasks. Furthermore, predominately they are made mandatory, and only some on a facultative basis, after recognising the needs of the population and taking into account the financial capacity of the unit. Additionally the self-governments perform the tasks commissioned by the state's administration and the resolutions. These tasks and as well as the part of mandatory own tasks include the payment of certain allowances of rigidly specified amount based on the beneficiary's income, local governments receive funds from the state budget in the form of targeted subsidies. In practice, these amounts are often not enough to fully cover the expenses and the self-governments subsidize their implementation from their own revenues⁶.

The social assistance tasks are performed by the particular levels of the self-government structure based on the principle of subsidiarity and each of them specializes in a specific type of them. The obligations of the municipalities include three groups of duties i.e.: building a system of social assistance, granting social assistance in the form of direct or indirect financial support and assistance in kind. They are the main units performing the tasks of direct contact with the people being in the need of social assistance and the tasks in the field of benefits, which only slightly burden the districts and even less the self-governments⁷. The domain of the districts is helping families and vulnerable, ill, elderly people or residents with special needs, which is accomplished through many specialized institutions e.g. nursing and education centers or assistance centers⁸. The provinces usually do not engage with direct social assistance; they focus mainly on developing plans, preparing programs aiming at solving social

⁶ J. Śmiechowicz, *Nieadekwatność wielkości i rodzajów transferów z budżetu państwa do wzrastającego zakresu zadań samorządowych*, w: *Dotacje i subwencje w systemie finansowym samorządu terytorialnego*, red. A. Borodo, TNOiK, Toruń, s. 82.

⁷ I. Sierpowska, *Pomoc społeczna*, LEX a Wolters Kluwer business, Warszawa; W. Maciejko, *Instytucje pomocy społecznej*, LexisNexis, Warszawa 2011, s. 224.

⁸ J. Śmiechowicz, *Ewolucja wydatków jednostek samorządu terytorialnego w Polsce na tle procesu decentralizacji zadań publicznych*, Difin, Warszawa 2011, s. 25.

problems and making assessments⁹ and as a consequence do not bear high expenses for tasks in the field of social assistance.

2. Unemployment and poverty as the basic determinants of the society's need for social assistance

A large part of the Polish society are people living in modest or even very poor conditions. During couple of years after the Polish accession to the EU the financial situation of the Polish society had been gradually improving and the indicator of poverty risk (calculated as the proportion of the number of people with equivalent disposable income, which is 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers) had been gradually reduced from 20.5% in 2005 to 16.9% in 2008. However, since 2009 the risk of poverty in Poland has been gradually increasing. At the end of 2011 its indicator was already as high as 17.7%. In the year 2012 (for the second time in a row) a decrease in the real value of household income by 0.2% and decrease of expenses by 0.8% was reported¹⁰. Apart from the given indicators poverty is also measured in Poland with, among others, the indicator of relative poverty – showing the percentage of people living in households in which the expenses were below 50% of average expenditure of all households, statutory (taking into account the level of social intervention, and thus the amount of which, in accordance with the applicable law on social assistance entitles one to obtain financial benefits) and extreme (determined at the level of the subsistence minimum). In 2012, extreme poverty affected 6.7% of people; the relative poverty index value slightly decreased, which was 16%, which is 0.7 percentage point less than in 2011, while below the legal poverty line, there were 7% of Poles and this, in turn, was by 0.5 percentage point more than in the previous year¹¹. An important factor

⁹ P. Chmielnicki, *Świadczenie usług przez samorząd terytorialny w Polsce. Zagadnienia ustrojowoprawne*, Municipium SA, Warszawa 2005, s. 103; M. Dercz, *Samorząd terytorialny w systemie ochrony zdrowia*, Municipium SA, Warszawa 2005, s. 140.

¹⁰ *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych w 2012 roku w świetle wyników badania budżetów gospodarstw domowych*, Materials for a conference on 29 May 2013, GUS, www.stat.gov.pl (11.02.2014).

¹¹ The threshold for social intervention in Poland was not indexed for 6 years, despite inflation and the rising cost of living. The criterion for granting social assistance was valorised in the fourth quarter of 2012 and if it had been the basis for determining the range of basic poverty in the whole 2012 it would relate to 13.2%, and not only 7.2% people; *Ubóstwo w Polsce w świetle badań GUS*, GUS, Warszawa 2013, s. 7.

increasing the risk of living in extreme deficiency is the place of residence. Usually the bigger the city, the lower the risk. But these small groups of people living in large urban areas experience extremely deep poverty¹². Taking the share of people receiving social benefits in the general population as the measure of poverty in the cities with the district rights it should be noted that the situation in the different entities differs considerably in this respect, and the percentage of population with this kind of support ranged from 1.6% to 12.5 %.

Poverty in Poland threatens especially people who are unemployed, who are living on unearned sources and numerous families. The position in the job market is a factor determining the material and social status of a given person and his or her family. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate at the end of 2012 in Poland equaled 13.4% while 35.4% of people were unemployed for more than a year. Difficulties in finding a job are faced especially by young people – aged 25–34 and they are not even protected by higher education. Unemployment considerably increases the risk of poverty of the family. While in the households where this phenomenon does not occur the rate of extreme poverty is about 5%, in the households where one person is unemployed – it increases to 13% and in the families where at least two persons are unemployed it is 33%¹³. The level of unemployment in cities with district rights ranged from 4–5% in agglomerations like Warsaw, Sopot, Poznań i Wrocław to almost 23% in Włocławek i Grudziądz representing units inhabited by smaller population.

3. Expenditure of the cities with district rights for social assistance and its territorial diversification in Poland

Performing the social assistance tasks is regarded as one of the crucial areas of the self-government activities in Poland. Since the beginning of their existence they contributed a large part of resources remaining at local and regional entities disposal. During 1999–2006 the share of spending for social services delivered by all levels of self-government in Poland had been progressively increasing from 10.4% in 1999 to 16.5% in 2006. Although in the subsequent years the financial resources for the implementation of these tasks had risen, the

¹² G. Węclawowicz, *Przestrzeń ubóstwa – nowy czy stary wymiar zróżnicowania społeczno-przestrzennego w miastach Polski*, „Przegląd Geograficzny” 2001, no. 73, s. 451–475.

¹³ *Ubóstwo w Polsce...*, s. 7.

position of social assistance expenditure in its overall structure had declined. The discussed group of expenditure had over the period 1999–2012 slightly smaller position in the budgets of the cities with district rights but it must be emphasized that these entities had covered at that time a great part of self-government expenses for social assistance and policy. In 2002–2012 this percentage oscillated between 26% (in 2012) to 35% (in 2003). Considering the number of cities with district rights existing in Poland i.e. 65, such rates indicate on broad range of tasks and responsibilities of these entities and large amount of financial resources spent on to fulfil these duties. Such situation is the consequence of performing by cities double tasks – attributed both to municipalities (responsible for delivering most of social benefits) and districts (responsible for family assistance). The data provided by cities with district rights for 2012 indicate that the highest expenses were generated by payments of family benefits, advances of maintenance allowances and pensions (28.5%), public nursing homes (12.5%), social welfare centers (9.4%), education and care centers (6.8%), housing allowances (6.2%) and different forms of assistance in kind and financial allowances (in total 9.1%)¹⁴. Additionally high expenditure in these units are determined by large number of inhabitants eligible for benefits and by numerous social institutions existing on their territory.

The amount spent for social assistance and social policy *per capita* incurred by the cities with district rights differs considerably in the country.

¹⁴ Own calculations based on data from the Ministry of Finance, www.mf.gov.pl (11.02.2014).

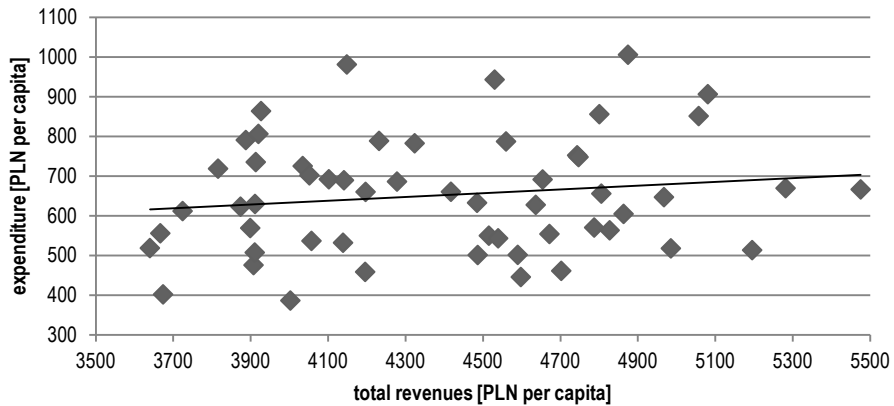


Figure 1. Expenditure of the cities with district rights for social assistance and policy *per capita* compared to the total revenue *per capita*

Source: Own elaboration based on MF and CSO data.

The research findings, however do not confirm the thesis that the size of the revenue of local self-governments determines the scope of social assistance and policy expenditures. In the case of this group of units (after eliminating extreme values) only a slight increasing tendency is visible in terms of expenses in the given field, however, it must be pointed out that the deviations from the general trends are very significant. The maximum expenses incurred for social assistance and policy are 2.5 times higher per capita than the lowest.

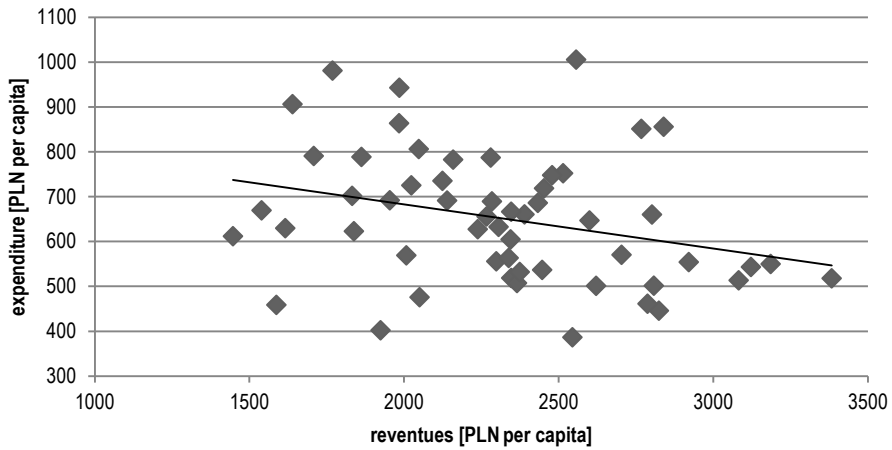


Figure 2. Expenditure of cities with district rights for social assistance and policy *per capita* compared to their own revenue *per capita*

Source: Own elaboration based on MF and CSO data.

Surprising, however, are the results of the research of the size of social assistance and policy expenditure *per capita* in conjunction with the own income collected by the cities with district rights. It turns out that in the discussed group of units a reversed relation between those values can be observed. Most often the higher the own income of the city, the lower the expenditures *per capita* for the tasks in the field of social assistance and policy.

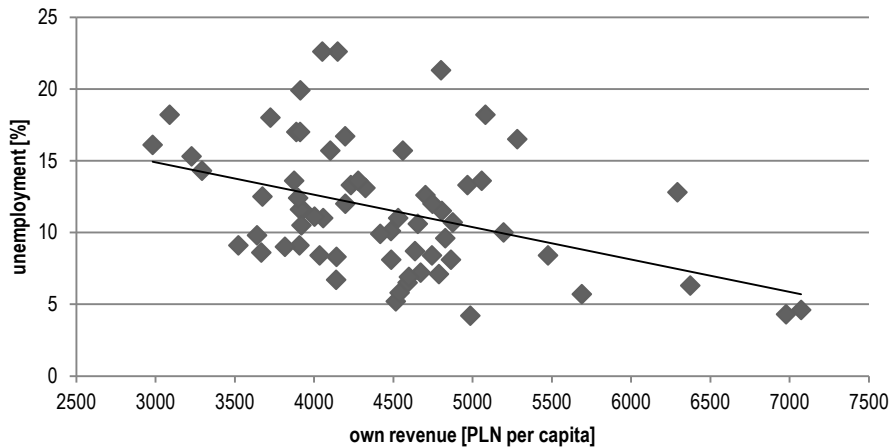


Figure 3. The amount of cities' with district rights own revenue *per capita* in relation to the unemployment rate

Source: Own elaboration based on MF and CSO data.

Such a situation can be caused by the fact that an essential part of the cities' with district rights own income is represented by the share in the proceeds of the tax on personal income paid by their residents. Thus they are higher in those units where the unemployment rate is relatively low. The other factors that may strongly affect the amount spent for social assistance and social policy *per capita* incurred by the cities with district rights are the scope of poverty and unemployment rate occurring in the area.

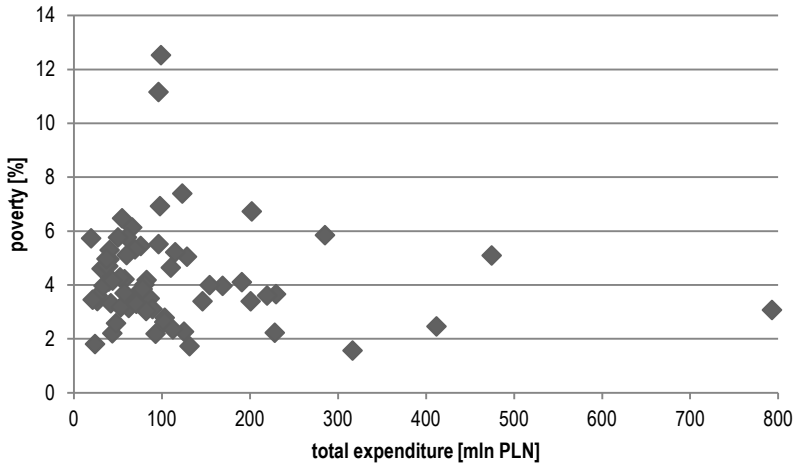


Figure 4. The expenditure for social assistance and policy in cities with district rights against the poverty rate

Source: Own elaboration based on MF and CSO data.

As was already pointed out the range of poverty in reviewed entities was measured by the share of benefit recipients in the total population of the cities with district rights. The results of the analysis provide to unexpected information – the number of inhabitants entitled to social protection and the total amount spent on social assistance and policy by cities with district rights in Poland are not correlated (the Pearson correlation coefficient is equal 0.01). The poverty rate differs more significantly than the total expenditures spent on this field of cities' tasks. Moreover in as many as 46 of the 65 reviewed local units the total expenditure for social assistance stayed below the national average.

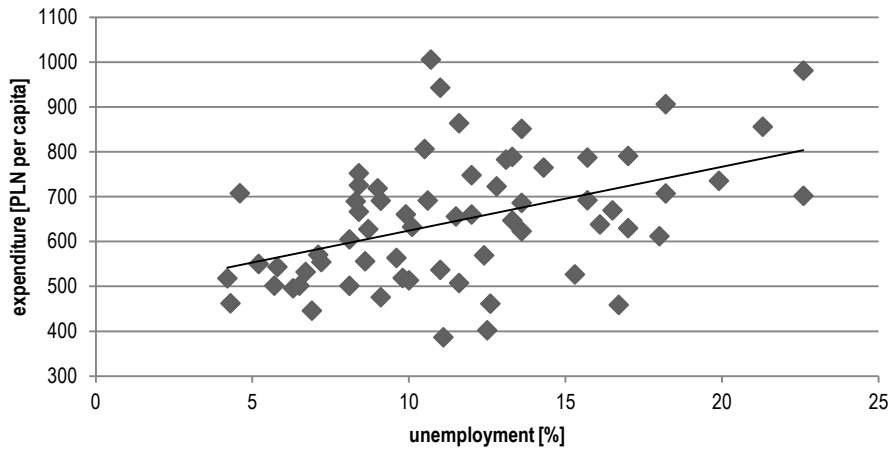


Figure 5. The expenditure for social assistance and policy *per capita* in cities with district rights against the unemployment rate

Source: Own elaboration based on MF and CSO data.

As the main reason of poverty, unemployment determines the expenses for social assistance and policy in cities with district rights and its high level is reflected in the expenditures *per capita* incurred by them for the social support.

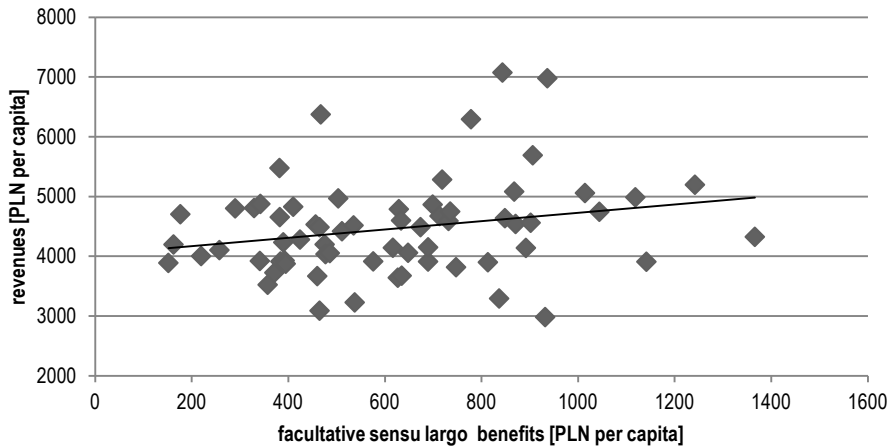


Figure 6. The amount of facultative *sensu largo* benefits in cities with district rights against their total revenue per one inhabitant

Source: Own elaboration based on ML&SP, MF and CSO data.

The resourcefulness of a city with district rights clearly translates into the amount of benefits per one beneficiary of social assistance, which are granted and determined by the competent organs of the unit. Such a tendency is revealed already in the case of facultative *sensu largo* benefits (the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.34), and in the case of facultative *sensu stricte* benefits its even more visible (the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.65).

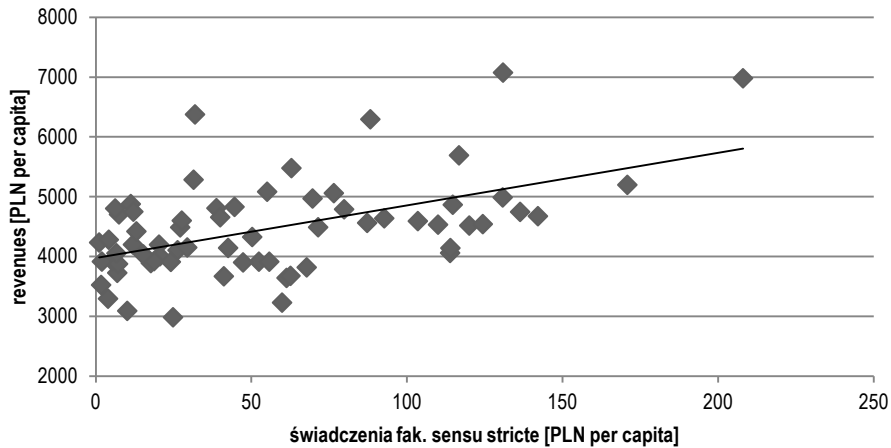


Figure 7. The amount of facultative *sensu stricte* benefits in cities with district rights against their total revenue per one inhabitant

Source: Own elaboration based on ML&SP, MF and CSO data.

It is noticeable that the amount of benefits, in granting which the government has complete freedom varies greatly across the country and in 2012 ranged from 1 to 208 PLN per beneficiary. In almost $\frac{1}{5}$ of units their value size ranged up to 20 PLN per beneficiary. Payments exceeding 100 PLN per person were implemented in 14 units. The highest amounts were granted in the richest city with district rights, in the capital of the country – Warsaw, which is characterized at the same time with the lowest unemployment rate among such units. In poor cities the level of facultative *per capita* benefits is usually very low. Greater financial abilities of the self-government not always mean, however, that it is interested in granting additional social assistance to its inhabitants.

Final conclusions and recommendations

The conducted analysis does not indicate that along with the increase of income per inhabitant being at the disposal of a local self-government unit occurs an increase in expenses for social assistance and policy. In some cases such a relation can be actually observed but usually the more resourceful units spend

less for the discussed needs than the poorer self-governments. This relation becomes even more distinctive when the expenses are related to the self-government's own income. This regularity indicates the important role of the transfers from the state budget in financing its tasks in the field of social assistance and policy and confirms the thesis that the wealth of its units is determined by the financial situation of the residents of it. In wealthier local self-government units the demand for help and social policy is lower, hence lower expenditure to finance this kind of tasks *per capita*. Larger financial capacity of local self-governments is instead reflected in the amount of granted facultative *sensu stricte* benefits.

Taking into account the results of the above presented studies and considering the problem of implementing the tasks in the field of social assistance and policy in a broader context (i.e. taking into account the results of the checks carried out by the Supreme Chamber of Control, which confirm that poorer municipalities inhabited by poor people have problems with the proper execution of the tasks of this field, including the fulfillment of certain statutory standards for their execution) some conclusions and recommendations can be formulated.

In a country like Poland, that is characterized by large disparities in development and wealth of individual units of local self-government and a high proportion of people living on a shoestring, and even very poorly, decentralization of tasks in the field of social assistance and policy and funding the support with own income is risky, as it may lead to failure in satisfying significant needs of local communities being most in need of social support, its low efficiency, reduced access to social assistance and services of low standard by poorer municipalities. Recognizing the increased efficiency of local self-government over the government administration in terms of implementation of the tasks of social assistance one can wonder about the proper source of funding of the tasks in this field. Undoubtedly, the financing of a substantial part of the benefits granted by the local self-government, as is the case in Poland, is a kind of protection for both the local self-governments and the people eligible for these benefits, but it is not an ideal solution. The transfer of funds from the state budget in the form of general subsidies, the purpose of which could be stated by the self-government bodies, seems to be a much better solution.

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**WYDATKI NA POMOC I POLITYKĘ SPOŁECZNĄ MIAST NA PRAWACH
POWIATU W POLSCE W KONTEKŚCIE ICH MOŻLIWOŚCI
FINANSOWYCH I POTRZEB MIESZKAŃCÓW**

Streszczenie

System pomocy społecznej w Polsce przeszedł w ciągu ostatniego ćwierćwiecza istotną przebudowę i, zgodnie z rozpowszechnionymi w państwach Europy Zachodniej wzorcami, oparty jest obecnie na zasadzie decentralizacji. Jednostkom samorządu terytorialnego przekazano zasadniczą część zadań z tej dziedziny nie zapewniając im jednak środków adekwatnych do ich zakresu. Znaczne zróżnicowanie dochodów samorządów na terenie kraju i ich ścisłe powiązanie z lokalną bazą ekonomiczną rodzi niepokój, że z uwagi na słabość finansową niektórych jednostek nie będą one w stanie zaspokoić ważnych potrzeb swoich mieszkańców. Za główny cel niniejszego opracowania przyjęto więc zbadanie, czy i jak zasobność jednostek samorządu terytorialnego wpływa na poziom świadczeń społecznych przekazywanych członkom społeczności lokalnej, opierając się na przykładzie miast na prawach powiatu w Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe: wydatki jednostek samorządu terytorialnego, pomoc społeczna, ubóstwo

Tłumaczenie Joanna Śmiechowicz