

Information on the research:

Analysis of employment councils' activities and their impact on labour market policy development in the years 2004-2008

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Objective and methodology of the research

The objective of the research was to diagnose the employment councils' activities in the 2004-2008 cadence in order to improve their functioning and thus increase the scope of their impact on the labour market policy at local, regional and central level.

The analysis have been carried out using questionnaire research (e-questionnaire CAWI) addressed to chairmen of employment council of regional (voivodship) and local (powiat) level as well as to employment authorities. In the diagnosis characteristics of the areas where employment councils operate were taken into consideration, with regard to a size of a voivodship/a powiat and the economic profile of thereof.

Results of the research

Results of the research present the image of employment councils' functioning presented by their chairman and employment authorities.

1. Composition of employment councils

Powiat employment councils numbered 15 persons on average, while voivodship councils – 17 persons. Trade union organizations, employers' organizations and farmers' organizations of social-trade character were represented in the employment councils in the largest numbers. Moreover, in the powiat employment councils a significant representation of local government units was observed, while in the voivodship councils – of nongovernmental organizations dealing with labour market issues.

The opinion of the sweeping majority of respondents is that no changes in the councils' composition are necessary.

2. Competences of the employment councils' members

The great majority of the councils' chairmen acknowledged that all or majority of members of employment councils they managed possessed enough competences to work in a respective council.

According to the respondents the reason of any lack of sufficient preparation to work in such a council demonstrated by some members was no criteria for candidates' selection developed by delegating institutions and shortage of trainings.

More than 90% of the employment councils' chairmen ascertained that members of the councils should participate in trainings. Such trainings were already organised for the majority of employment councils (the most often there were 1-2 trainings organised within the respective term of analysis) and the majority of councils' members participated in the trainings.

3. Course of activities of the employment councils

The significant majority of employment councils had sessions at least once every three months. However in case of more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of councils – failure to keep the mandatory frequency of sessions was observed.

In practice all employment councils fulfilled their statutory obligations.

Realisation of tasks other than those imposed by law was declared by almost $\frac{1}{2}$ of employment councils of voivodship level and only less than $\frac{1}{6}$ of those of poviats level. Such tasks the respondents recognised as follows: involvement in development of cooperation and local partnership, activities performed in order to develop international cooperation for employment promotion and ventures aimed at increasing the employment level of foreigners and disabled people.

Both groups of respondents are in great majority of the opinion that the employment councils fulfill the function of advisory body for employment authorities entrusted to them properly.

As far as cooperation with other authorities, organisations and institutions that are not represented in a council is concerned, the voivodship councils were much more active: almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of councils of that level declared that they invited to their sessions representatives of such authorities and institutions often or very often, whereas only $\frac{1}{4}$ of poviats councils declared to do so.

Such cooperation is considered as purposeful by $\frac{4}{5}$ of respondents representing voivodship councils and only $\frac{1}{3}$ of those representing poviats ones.

4. Impact of employment councils on labour market policy development and social dialogue

Sweeping majority of respondents stated that councils influence local/regional labour market policy.

However opinions on impact of employment councils on national labour market policy conducted by the government were different. Less than half respondents representing poviats and about 1/3 of those representing voivodship councils ascertained that their councils influence that policy. The impact of employment councils on the national labour market policy was not observed by more than 1/3 representatives of poviats and about 1/4 representatives of voivodship ones. More than 1/4 of all respondents had no opinion on that topic.

Reasons that may lead to lack of employment councils' influence on the state government's labour market policy, recognised by the respondents, were as follows: lack of sufficient legal powers of employment councils, including the fact that recommendations and opinions of the councils are not binding.

A significant diversity in opinions was observed as far as the question of impact of poviats and voivodship employment councils on the state of social dialogue in Poland is concerned. Less than 1/2 respondents acknowledged that the councils have that kind of impact, a little more than 1/4 of respondents did not observe any influence of the councils on the state of social dialogue, whereas nearly 1/4 respondents did not have any opinion on that topic.

Respondents asked why the employment councils did not influence social dialogue in Poland answered similarly as to the question on the impact of the councils' activities on the labour market policy conducted by the state government, indicating lack of sufficient powers of the employment councils.

Conclusions and recommendations

Employment councils were established nearly 20 years ago as consultative and advisory institutions for employment authorities and in order to be an important forum of social dialogue in Poland.

The research proves that in the opinion of the employment councils' chairmen and employment authorities' representatives, the employment councils properly fulfill duties of an advisory body entrusted to them. At the same time part of respondents indicated lack of sufficient competences of the employment councils, including the fact that recommendations and opinions of the councils are not binding.

In the opinion of both chairmen of the employment councils and employment authorities, the effective councils' structure as well as the way of appointing councils' members does not require any changes. Only regulations on electing a council's members in case there is only one council appointed in a given area need to be particularised.

The research confirmed that the councils often show inclinations to treat their functions formally. All councils examined fulfilled their statutory obligations properly, whereas, as far as performing optional tasks (not obligatory ones) is concerned, voivodship councils revealed much greater activity. The latter were also considerably more active in including into their activities the representatives of those institutions that were of significant importance from the point of view of the labour market policy but were not members of the council.

On the basis of the results obtained, the following set of recommendations on organisation, activities and tasks to be performed by the employment councils was formulated:

1. Ensuring participation of persons possessing relevant knowledge and competences in the work of employment councils' is of key importance. Therefore criteria for selecting candidates for the councils' members should be developed and those criteria should be respected by the delegating institutions.
2. Trainings for the councils' members should take place more frequently. Special attention should be paid to a training offer addressed to the councils operating in small poviats – as the research revealed that within the past cadence the fewest trainings were conducted there.



3. Creation of possibilities for the councils to receive support of external experts is advisable.
4. Reduction of obligatory minimum number of councils' sessions is worth considering. That would be in line with de facto situation and thus session held could concentrate on strategic issues. Obviously – if needed – the councils could meet more often.
5. At the same time it is advisable to put more stress to the communication and educational function of the councils, especially when it comes to reducing the number of obligatory sessions.
6. As the research revealed, the employment councils acting in small poviats and poviats of rural profile realise optional tasks much more rarely than the other councils. Representatives of small poviats' councils have also much smaller sense of influence on local labour market policy than those of big poviats and voivodships. Therefore development of special activation program addressed to those councils of small poviats is advisable.
7. Although the respondents did not suggested necessity of changes in the employment councils' structures, it would be advisable to consider return to the classic trilateral model (public administration – trade unions – employers) in order to improve the streamline of the councils' activities. At the same time the councils should become open to consult opinions and cooperate with representatives of science, education and non-governmental organisations who could constitute their intellectual and expert background.
8. Abandoning the consultative and advisory model operating so far is worth considering as well as conferring certain scope of decisive powers upon the councils. Nevertheless such a solution would require a separate analysis as far as legal and functional aspects are concerned.
9. In case any legal modifications are executed, a clear delimitation of tasks between the Voivodship Employment Council and the Voivodship Commission for Social Dialogue shall be performed.