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***Activation of older unemployed based  
on individualised approach  
in the opinion of public employment services staff—  
the research results***

***Summary***

This paper attempts to analyse the opinions of the Polish public employment services staff about individualised approach applied in activation of older unemployed in Poland for the first time. The research is based on the qualitative data collected using Paper & Pen Personal Interview (PAPI) with caseworkers which were conducted while testing the strategy for activating the unemployed 50+, developed on the basis of best German practises, as part of the project titled *IMPULS 50+. Activation strategies of the elderly unemployed for Public Employment Services*. As the obtained results show, caseworkers confirm that individualised approach through the use of an in-depth individual capacity assessment and proactive, innovative, non-standard measures allows for effective and sustainable integration of the elderly unemployed with the labour market. Individual

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coaching, medical consultations and financial incentives are considered to be particularly useful activation measures.

**Key words:** activation of older unemployed, individualised approach, public employment services

## *Introduction*

Population ageing, as well as increasing labour shortages, especially when it comes to the sufficiently skilled and competent workers, more and more often leaves the employers with no other choice, but to search for employees among the ageing labour force. One of the fastest-growing developmental challenges is concerned with increasing the employment levels of older people by them with help enabling them to remain employed at least until they reach the retirement age, or even after that age. The employment policies of many European countries have undergone a paradigm shift involving a move away from solutions leading to the deactivation and premature withdrawal of older persons from the labour market, and towards measures promoting the continuation of professional work even after reaching the statutory retirement age. According to the Eurostat data (2017), among the countries most successful in this area are such members of the European Economic Community (EEC), as Sweden, Germany, and Denmark, with their employment rates of persons aged 55–64 reaching: 76.4%, 70.1% and 68.9%, respectively. In comparison, during the same period, it reached 48.3% in Poland, and 57.1% in the European Union (28). This indicator shows just how much distance still separates Poland from the other European countries in this regard. In the light of the GUS data (2018), the situation of persons over 50 on the Polish labour market does not look good. The registered unemployed over 50 years old constitute a large group among those without job, amounting to 27.6% of the total number of registered unemployed in December of 2017. According to the Golden Age Index report (PwC, 2018), the unemployment levels are decreasing at the slowest rate among the older unemployed, while Poland is underusing the potential of persons aged 55+ on the labour market.

Older people are at less risk of losing their jobs; however, if they do become unemployed, it is very unlikely for them to find re-employment.<sup>2</sup> Rarely do people aged 50+ manage to find a job independently with the use of such recruitment channels as advertisements in the press or on the Internet. What may be helpful in keeping this group of unemployed persons on the labour market, are the well-thought-out and well-designed active labour market policies, defined by Hofäcker in his concept (2015) as factors “stay type” determining the labour activity of the older persons. When defining the goals of

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<sup>2</sup> Individual and institutional barriers in the employment of older persons are well known and well described in the source literature. For more on the subject, see: Phillipson, Smith, 2005; Heywood, Siebert, 2009; Chłoń-Domińczak, 2010; Knuth, 2012; Kryńska, Krzyszkowski, Urbaniak, Wiktorowicz, 2013; Kryńska, 2015.

labour market policy with regard to the unemployed older persons, it seems crucial to answer the question of how, and with the help of which instruments, could this segment of the labour market be influenced successfully. Positive experiences of many European countries, especially Germany, in bringing the older unemployed back into the labour market show that effective economic activation of this group requires an individualised approach to each person, close cooperation at the advisory stage, and the use of innovative measures (Scharle, 2012; Knuth, Stegmann, Zink, 2014).

Despite the lack of regulations that would allow for a more flexible approach towards the unemployed, the public employment services in Poland are making efforts to activate their clients aged 50+ in an individualised and non-standard way—such conclusions can be drawn from the study entitled *How to Support Effectively? Good Practices for the Activation of Persons Aged 50+* (MPiPS, 2015). Another example of an attempt to apply the German experience to the Polish labour market policy, is the comprehensive strategy of labour activation of the unemployed persons aged 50 and older—an innovative solution developed within the framework of the project by POWER, titled—as mentioned earlier—*IMPULS 50+*. The strategy is based on measures covering the early identification of problems and expectations of people seeking employment, and the development of individualised activation plans including the offer of “tailor-made” support, adjusted to the needs of older unemployed persons.

Various attempts have been made to integrate the activation programmes providing the unemployed with individualised approach and non-standard forms of assistance into the Polish labour market policy; thus, it seems reasonable to learn more about the experiences and observations of the vocational counsellors working at the labour offices directly involved in their implementation. The aim of this article is to evaluate the utility of this innovative concept of labour activation in the re-employment process of persons aged 50+ on the local Polish labour markets, where many contrasts in situations and conditions can be observed.

### ***The idea of individualised approach to labour activation of the unemployed persons aged 50+ and innovative forms of supporting employment***

The concept of socio-economic activation of the unemployed based on individualised approach (person-centred approach) is a concept subscribing to the paradigm of activating labour market policies, and is present in the employment policies of many EEC countries (Weishaupt, 2011). It is utilised by such countries as: Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, France, Estonia, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom and Hungary (Hake, 2011). The application of this concept entails (Duchemin, Manoudi, 2014):

- early, in-depth individual capacity assessment of the unemployed person, and the use of profiling methods;
- provision of continuous support, as well as appropriate and timely forms of assistance;
- holistic interventions, as opposed to approaches focusing on only one aspect of employability; i.e. flexible adjustment of activation measures, selected in accordance

with the needs of a given unemployed person from a catalogue of all commonly-available instruments, as well as the openness to reaching for never-before used solutions—the individualisation of service;

- ensuring frequent and continued contacts (including electronic communication) with a single vocational counsellor in order to develop an appropriate relationship and mutual trust;
- development of basic competences and the provision of training opportunities regardless of the person’s employment status;
- more intensive job search assistance.

It may be concluded, that the individualised approach is based, at its core, on proactive measures, including the early identification of the needs and problems of persons who use profiling methods in job searching, as well as the development of individualised activation strategies that provide the “tailor-made” support offer, adapted to meet the specific needs of the clients with regards to seeking re-employment (Knuth, 2012). Therefore, the means of supporting each unemployed individual should include a variety of legally approved services and instruments available to the public employment services. The individualised approach is a move away from creating specialised sets of instruments adjusted to the requirements of given target group (group approach), and in favour of choosing (from a catalogue of all available means) only those instruments which, in relation to a specific unemployed person, will effectively eliminate the barriers to taking up work, regardless of their belonging to a particular unemployment category. Such understanding of the concept suggests that every instrument permitted under law can be used in the individualised activation process, provided it is fully warranted by the situation of the unemployed person; in fact, it is strongly recommended to be open to reaching for new, never-before used solutions, or even to experiment and test them on the unemployed.

Using the best German labour market policy practises of working with the unemployed persons aged 50+, an innovative solution was developed as part of the project by POWER, titled *IMPULS 50+*, enabling comprehensive labour activation of the older unemployed. The key elements of this innovative concept are: the in-depth individual capacity assessment process; the utilisation of modern communication channels in the contacts between the vocational counsellors and the unemployed; the catalogue of non-standard forms of supporting employment; and the conclusion of an individual contract between the unemployed and the labour office. In the activation strategy described above, the process of in-depth assessment of a job seeker’s individual capacity is conducted with active participation from the client, and includes analysis and evaluation of (Maksim, Wiśniewski, Wojdyło, 2018):

- qualifications and key professional competences,
- social and personal competences,
- intellectual and health-related potential,
- the level of motivation and life values,
- framework conditions (family situation, housing, economic situation, mobility, time flexibility, and sensitive problems, e.g. addiction).

Conducting a thorough assessment requires time, as well as frequent and regular contacts between the client and the consultant; what should foster this process is the utilisation of modern means, such as the dedicated Internet platform, enabling free and regular electronic communication of the unemployed and their vocational counsellors working at the labour offices, and allowing the counsellors to more accurately monitor the progress of the unemployed in the implementation of their individualised activation strategies. At the assessment-advisory stage, it is necessary to use different types of assessment methods, ranging from biographical and behavioural interviews, tests of professional abilities, interests, and preferences, to professional competence assessment tools enabling a detailed review of the qualifications and competences of the job seeker.

The catalogue of the non-standard forms of supporting employment that were tested includes the following groups of means: educational and developmental activities, preventive healthcare, work on personal image, support for spatial mobility, and financial incentives (Table 1). The proposed instruments are an important part of the innovative solution based on German experience. It should be stressed, that the forms of assistance specified in the catalogue did not constitute an exhaustive list, but rather, due to formal reasons relating to the implementation of an EU project, their utilisation in the process of social and professional activation was specified in the guidelines on the use of the resources of the Support, Integration and Development Fund (IMPULS 50+, 2018). Considering the practises of the public employment services, especially in the area of activation of the unemployed aged 50+, many of these means should be considered as innovative, because they were used in Poland for the first time or were used earlier, but in a much narrower scope, or for a completely different purpose and in a different way.

**Table 1. Innovative forms of supporting employment utilised in work with the unemployed aged 50+**

<b>Non-standard Form of Support</b>	<b>SCOPE OF SUPPORT</b>
<b>Educational and Development Activities</b>	
Individual coaching	individual meetings with a personal coach, lasting 6 hours per person, conducted outside the seat of the labour office, aimed at supporting the unemployed person in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• going through the process of professional activation</li> <li>• finding and developing solutions to enable them to build an effective individual pathway of professional development</li> <li>• identify their own sources of motivation to seek out and take up work</li> </ul>
Professional self-marketing	individual counselling sessions, lasting 6 hours per person, aimed at helping the unemployed to develop their own brand on the labour market, by providing them assistance in the preparation of professional resumes and in building their image on social media (e.g. creating professional profiles or posting personal advertisements of the “I am looking for a job” type)

Table 1. Cont.

<b>Non-standard Form of Support</b>	<b>SCOPE OF SUPPORT</b>
Job-training	group classes, comprising 6 two-hour meetings in groups of 5–15 unemployed persons; workshop meetings of support groups for people seeking employment and those who have found it, aimed at overcoming social isolation and the lack of networking skills, as well as at enabling the development of social competences necessary on the modern labour market, such as teamwork, communication, and self-presentation
Support for personal development	group classes, 36 hours in total, devoted to the following issues: stress relief, communication, preventive healthcare, and good nutrition
Improvement courses	vocational trainings constituting an extension of the training programs offered by province labour offices, enabling the unemployed to gain new qualifications, or to broaden or renew the competences they already possessed; which, however, do not meet the statutory requirements of vocational training, e.g. language courses, professional driving lessons, category B driving license courses
Preparing work samples for employers	meetings with potential employers, enabling the unemployed to present their professional competences and skills in a practical way—by performing standard tasks that would be typical for the jobs they would like to apply for
<b>Health prevention</b>	
Preventive health-care	a wide range of support means aimed at eliminating or reducing the health barriers hindering the unemployed in seeking, taking up, or maintaining employment; in the form of both general and specialist medical examinations and procedures, such as analytical tests, echocardiogram tests, ECG, ultrasound, X-ray, and medical consultations with neurologists, cardiologists, ophthalmologists, laryngologists, endocrinologists, dermatologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists
Reimbursement of medical equipment purchase costs	support in the purchase of medical equipment, e.g. glasses, hearing aids
<b>Work on personal image</b>	
Support of image building	additional assistance provided on the basis of feedback from a self-marketing coach enabling the unemployed to: use hairdressing and beauty services, take a professional photo, prepare and print a CV, record a video CV
<b>Supporting spatial mobility</b>	
Monthly tickets	actions aimed at increasing spatial mobility of the unemployed in the form of financing the purchase of monthly tickets or reimbursement of the costs of their purchase
<b>Financial incentives</b>	
Premiums for finding and maintaining employment independently	financial bonuses granted to the unemployed for finding and taking up non-subsidised employment (meeting certain criteria) on their own, and then maintaining it for at least three months

Source: IMPULS 50+ (2018).

Due to the specific characteristics of the unemployed persons aged 50+, such as: low motivation to change their situation, health problems, high susceptibility to interrupt the process of activation, and resignation from work, it is recommended that public employment services apply non-standard measures of support already at the assessment stage, as well as extend the support also after the person takes up employment. What should also be emphasized with regards to the activation strategy based on individualised approach and non-standard measures of support aimed at the unemployed persons aged 50+, is the importance of the conclusion of an individual contract between the client and the labour office, which defines the rights and obligations of both parties—an approach based the mutual obligation (*fördern und fordern*) principle used in German labour market policy.

### ***Data sources and research method***

The research material was gathered while the province labour offices were testing the abovementioned comprehensive activation strategy of the unemployed aged 50+ — a solution based on German experience and adapted to Polish conditions, developed by Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń in cooperation with Bundesagentur für Arbeit—Regionaldirektion Berlin Brandenburg, and other Polish partners commissioned by the Centre for European Projects as part of the innovation project titled *IMPULS 50+*. The strategy was tested on three local labour markets, which were selected according to the following scheme:

- one province from the group of provinces in a good labour market situation, with the registered unemployment rate lower than 10%;
- one province from the group of provinces in a difficult labour market situation, with the registered unemployment rate falling within the range of 10–20%;
- one province from the group of provinces in a particularly difficult labour market situation, with the registered unemployment rate exceeding 20%.

From among the group of provinces with a good situation on the labour market, the city of Toruń was selected for testing—with the registered unemployment rate of 6.1% at the end of 2016. The city of Grudziądz, with the unemployment rate of 13%, was selected from the group of provinces in a difficult labour market situation; and from the group of provinces with a particularly difficult situation on the labour market, the province of Włocławek was selected, with the unemployment rate of 22%. The provinces are located in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship (Maksim, Wiśniewski, Wojdyło, 2018). The activation strategy was tested by vocational counsellors, who worked with a group of 45 unemployed persons, consisting of 27 men and 18 women. Such proportion of the test group reflected the gender distribution of the unemployed in the 50–64 age group, and reflects the official statistics (GUS, 2017). The group included persons experiencing unemployment for various periods of time, of different social statuses, and education levels. Considering the duration of unemployment period and the level of education, the most diverse group of unemployed came from the province City of Toruń, and the least—

from the province City of Grudziądz. Such a selection of provinces took into account the diversity of the local labour markets' situations, while the size and structure of the group participating in the testing allowed for the individualisation of approach, and effective monitoring.

The data and opinions necessary to evaluate the individualised approach and innovative forms of support, which are the key elements of the activation strategy aimed at the unemployed aged 50+, were obtained by means of questionnaire interviews, conducted with vocational counsellors working at the three selected province labour offices, who tested the innovative activation strategy during their work with the unemployed persons aged 50+. The counsellors were asked to provide, in particular, their opinion on:

- the suitability of the methods proposed for individual capacity analysis of an unemployed person aged 50+,
- the work with the coach and the quality of data obtained from the coach regarding the activated unemployed,
- the effectiveness of innovative forms of support used for the labour activation of persons aged 50+,
- the utility of the Internet platform in the process of communication between the unemployed and vocational counsellors from other labour offices.

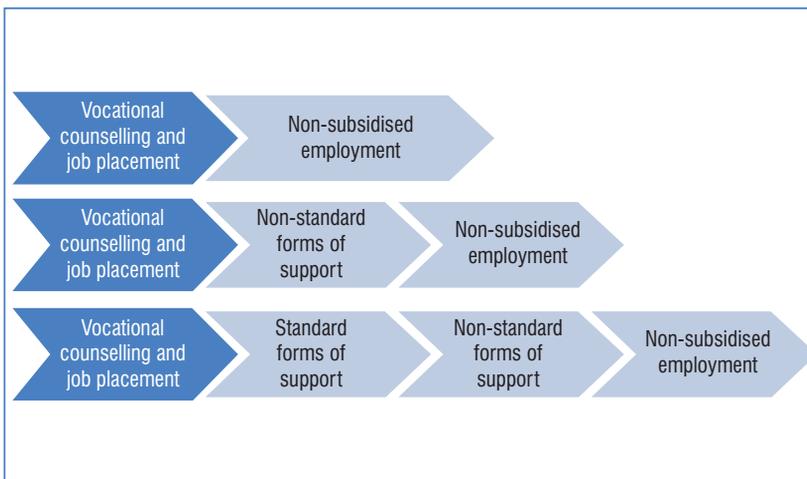
A specifically designed questionnaire was used in the study, in the form of a printed PAPI interview questionnaire, comprising closed, open, and table questions, grouped into the following thematic blocks: 1) assessment methods, 2) review of the employment context, 3) integration objective, 4) individualised activation strategy and the conclusion of an individual contract, 5) innovative forms of support, 6) evaluation of the Internet platform, 7) the achieved employment outcomes. In the period from November 2017 to January 2018, 9 personal interviews were conducted at the seats of the province labour offices selected for the survey.

### ***Research results***

The individualisation of the approach to work with the unemployed persons aged 50+ was made possible through the use of well-known solutions, tested in practice by the labour offices, as well as new solutions, based on German diagnostic tools and non-standard forms of support, unavailable to the labour offices, but provided by a non-governmental organisation (Table 1). The primary function of the innovative activation measures, adjusted to the particular situation of an unemployed person, was to reduce the individual factors hindering the older unemployed from taking up work or making it impossible for them. These factors are difficult to eliminate by using only traditional programmes, regulated by the provisions of the *Act of 20 April 2004 on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions* (Ustawa, 2004). These measures facilitated the successful completion of the labour activation process and strengthened the actions taken by vocational counsellors towards the older clients.

In this strategy, the activation of the unemployed aged 50+ could follow one of the planned paths. The initial stage of every path was based on vocational counselling (in-depth diagnostic process used in order to determine an individualised activation strategy) and support from the employment agency—services provided by caseworkers at the province labour offices. If the unemployed person found and took up employment (independently or on the basis of an offer from the labour office) at this stage, it means the utilisation of the first path. It is a “per-case, effects-based” path, because, apart from the actions designed by the client’s counsellor, it is the initiative of the unemployed person and the actions taken by them that lead to success in the form of employment, which means taking up non-subsidised work independently, or on the basis of an offer obtained at the labour office. In the second path, besides the counselling and employment agency support, the unemployed could also benefit from non-standard measures of support. The widest range of assistance, however, was offered to the unemployed aged 50+ as part of the third path. Apart from counselling and employment agency support, the unemployed were activated by means of non-standard and standard instruments (provided for in the aforementioned Polish Act of 20 April 2004 on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions and financed from the Labour Fund).

**Scheme 1. Applicable path of activation of the unemployed person aged 50+**



Source: own work.

The research results show that the largest number of the unemployed have completed the third activation path, which would justify the need to activate the older unemployed in standard (i.e. through using services and instruments specified in the Act), as well as non-standard ways. In the province of City of Toruń, the third activation path was completed by 6 unemployed people, 5 in the province of Włocławek, and 2 in the province of Grudziądz. It was possible to activate a total of 9 unemployed by means of the innovative instruments

only, including: 5 in Toruń, 3 in the province of Włocławek, and 1 in the province of Grudziądz. The first path of labour activation was not followed by any persons in the group of the unemployed participating in the testing process.

### *Assessment process*

Caseworkers engaging the unemployed clients aged 50+ utilised traditional and well-known methods of in-depth individual capacity assessment, such as: personal interview, monitoring of the unemployed by the counsellor, analysis and evaluation of materials provided by the clients, self-assessment of personal competences, health interview. No innovative methods, nor techniques, such as the elastic techniques, professional competence tests, Q-sort techniques, or the Johari window, were used. The reason for this was, presumably, the reluctance and resistance of the unemployed.

The personal interview, health interview, and self-assessment of competences were considered as particularly useful methods of assessing the situation and problems of unemployed persons aged 50+. Employees of the three surveyed province labour offices gave a negative opinion on relying on materials obtained from the client during the assessment of the soft areas of individual capacity, such as: personal and social competences, intellectual potential, health, professional interests, motivation, and life values. The main problem here is the fact that the unemployed do not have the information on this subject, because they lack the habit of collecting such info, as well as the willingness to bring documents concerning employment to the office. Vocational counsellors from the City of Toruń Province Labour Office pointed out, however, that a professional instrument for testing competences, and a test of temperament, would be very helpful assessment tools with regard to the analysed group of unemployed.

In the opinion of the respondents, the areas of individual capacity of the older unemployed that were the most difficult to analyse, turned out to be: motivation, state of health, framework conditions, and choice of potential occupation. In caseworkers' view, this was due to the attitude adopted by their older clients. First of all, the unemployed, especially the older, are often reluctant to share about their family affairs, assuming that some information are not important, and therefore do not need to be discussed with the labour office worker. It is worth noting that these tend to be sensitive topics, which require more time to be recognized. Secondly, the clients want to appear as good as possible in the eyes of the vocational counsellor, and therefore, very often manoeuvre between declarations of high motivation, while simultaneously pointing out many obstacles preventing them from taking up work; they assure about their great commitment to job searching, but at the same time they are not able to indicate the means nor channels through they were looking for a job. They do not admit to being passive in this respect. In the opinion of the vocational counsellors, the identification of the clients' strengths was the easiest step in the process of comprehensive personal capacity assessment of persons aged 50+. It was relatively difficult to identify the factors that could accelerate, but also hamper, the integration of the unemployed into the labour market. This was probably

due to the lack of willingness to engage in in-depth conversations on topics concerning personal, family and material matters.

When analysing the employment context of the clients aged 50+, the vocational counsellors considered the job offers available at the labour offices to be the most useful sources of information about the labour market. Such an opinion may be surprising, especially considering the fact that the labour office receives only 30% of job offers that appear on the labour market, and that these are not the most enticing offers. It can be assumed that these job offers may be the easiest for the caseworkers to access, and that these jobs are aimed at the clients of public employment services, meaning that the employer accepts the possibility of hiring an unemployed person, which is not guaranteed with job-search portals; therefore, the information published on such portals, as *pracuj.pl*, *jobs.pl*, *olx.pl*, or *Gazetapraca.pl*, was considered as secondary. In some cases, in order to more precisely determine the demand for a given type of work, besides the use of “profession barometer” or the analysis of job offers from the province labour offices, other sources of information about the labour market were used, such as: whispered marketing, professional contact networks, advertisements on social media (e.g. Facebook), and dedicated industry websites. At the Province Labour Office of the City of Toruń, the following municipal guidelines were used with regard to the labour activation approach based on start-up incentives: City of Toruń Development Strategy until 2020, City of Toruń Entrepreneurship Support Programme 2014–2020.

### ***Non-standard measures of support—individualisation of services***

According to the surveyed caseworkers, most of the applied non-standard forms of support turned out to be very effective in the process of activation of the older unemployed. The respondents clearly indicated that these measures work and are worth using for approaching this category of the unemployed. The benefits of individual coaching were particularly highly rated. The coaching was applied throughout the entire labour activation process: at the assessment-advisory stage, the implementation of individualised activation strategy stage, and after taking up employment. The goal of coaching was to guide the unemployed persons through the process aimed at finding the best solutions for building a path of professional development, as well as discovering and maintaining personal sources of motivation to work. In the opinion of the vocational counsellors, coaching turned out to be very helpful in work with the clients aged 50+, who find it much easier to open up in any other place than the labour office. The coaches were able to reach those areas of the client’s life and person, which would be impossible to access to an employee of public employment services. Initially, the labour office caseworkers were reluctant to involve outside trainers in the activation process, afraid of competition from their side; in the end, however, the cooperation with coaches was received in a very positive way. It was based on the exchange and comparison of opinions and observations about the client. Coaching strengthened the caseworker’s actions significantly, and was very helpful in setting the integration goals. The survey shows that the main advantages of coaching

include the possibility of working with trainers from outside the public employment services structure, and of conducting meetings with the unemployed at a location outside of the labour office seat. A potential drawback of this form of support was the risk of blurring the border between advisory and therapeutic process and a breach of confidentiality, which is very important for the newly introduced RODO regulation on the protection of personal data.

The possibility for people aged 50+ to benefit from medical consultations was an additional incentive to participate in the professional activation programme. Unemployed 50+ are not always ready to talk about their health. The possibility of targeting medical and diagnostic examinations in view of reducing or eliminating barriers hindering older unemployed people from seeking and taking up employment was particularly positively assessed, offering a relatively wide range of examinations and treatments, as opposed to the traditional medical examination which defines only the ability to perform work at a given position. The type and scope of the specialist examinations have always been decided by the occupational physician in charge. The unemployed could also count on a professional choice of medical equipment, such as glasses or hearing aids. It is worth stressing that while selecting instruments in the health prevention field, it was explained to the unemployed that the measures offered within this scope cannot replace the health services of the National Health Fund, but only those related to the increase in employability can be financed. Reliable health information is essential when setting an integration target for the unemployed aged 50+. According to vocational counsellors, the results of medical consultations helped continue working with clients in terms of their motivation and professional opportunities. Professional counsellors in all offices believed that the unemployed aged 50+ do not take proper care of their health, often, they do not even realise that they may have health problems and that this can be remedied. They often explain all ailments with the old age. It can therefore be concluded that these forms of assistance made the elderly unemployed aware that good health and proper prevention have a positive impact on employment and provide opportunities to continue working even after reaching the statutory retirement age.

The vocational counsellors surveyed assessed language courses moderately effective, which is in line with the opinion expressed also by the unemployed themselves, who showed interest in learning a foreign language, but it was difficult to reconcile participation in several activities at the same time. The advantage of improvement training was the possibility to choose a direction that was not offered by the employment office, while the disadvantage was the distant prospect of achieving the goal.

In the opinion of the respondents, instruments supporting the spatial mobility of the 50+ client, which were used not only at the stage of activation, but also for a certain period of time after taking up employment, proved effective in relation to the analysed unemployed group. The effectiveness of this form was largely determined by the method of implementation—the reimbursement of the costs of purchasing monthly tickets was perceived worse than direct financing of their purchase, in which case the unemployed did not have to lecture their own resources. The former method also required that

the unemployed take care to archive and organise the documents entitling them to have the expenses incurred reimbursed. As it was stressed, this form increased the chances of taking up employment away from the places of residence, yet within the administrative borders of the city. This concerned in particular the unemployed from the Grudziądz district.

The unemployed were motivated by the possibility to obtain a financial bonus for finding, taking up and maintaining employment for at least 3 months. The bonus could be granted to persons employed on the basis of an employment contract of at least part-time employment, on the basis of a civil law contract or starting their own business activity. This form of employment rewarded the activity of the unemployed in terms of independent job search and retention in employment. The services in the field of image support, such as hairdresser and beautician, also gave good results. They contributed to improve the well-being, raising the self-esteem of older unemployed people. Less enthusiastic statements were made about job-training and job samples, which allowed to present the level of competence of the unemployed to potential employers. Job-training identified with a “support group” aroused pejorative associations because of the instant link between the aid instrument and the alcohol problem. Due to prejudices, not all unemployed people were willing to participate in such activities. Moreover, not every unemployed person aged 50+ needs to participate in the activities of the support group. Such a problem occurred especially among the unemployed from the City of Toruń county, who mostly gave up this form of assistance. In the case of the unemployed from the county of Grudziądz, this instrument proved to be very useful. The reason for the weak interest in the work samples on the part of employers and the unemployed were mainly the existing administrative and legal barriers.

### ***Communicating with the unemployed***

The implementation of the individual activation strategy was monitored through direct personal and telephone contacts. The client preferred personal contacts, then they felt distinguished, important and needed. In case of taking up a job, due to lower availability, telephone conversations were more often practised. The unemployed were not interested in the e-mail form and tracking entries on the forum of the Internet platform. The Internet platform did not work well as a tool for communicating with the unemployed by customer service. The reason for this was the digital exclusion of some of the unemployed and limited access to computers and the Internet. The lack of conviction about this channel of communication was also visible among vocational counsellors. Customer service preferred telephone or text message contact.

In the opinion of the respondents, the cooperation with the unemployed participating in the project was very good. Clients behaved responsibly, answered calls, called back, initiated the calls, did not postpone meetings, reported in person outside the set deadlines. Despite having taken up work, they are still eager to communicate, share their successes and their professional and personal concerns.

## Conclusion

In the opinion of the surveyed employees of public employment services, the application of an individual approach to economic activation allows for effective and permanent integration of the unemployed in old age with the labour market. Taking into account the traditional (statutory) and innovative instruments of assistance applied in particular provinces in relation to 50+ clients, it can be stated that the individual approach to economic activation was used to a high degree in the districts: The city of Toruń and Włocławek, in the lower part—in the district of Grudziądz. In the latter, the unemployed formed the most homogeneous group, in which the majority of people were long-term unemployed with low professional qualifications.

The effectiveness of this approach is also confirmed by positive effects of individual strategies of economic activation applied to the unemployed aged 50+. The last measurement of employment effectiveness made on 31 December 2018 indicates that out of 15 unemployed people activated in an individual way in each labour office, the situation was as follows:

- in the District Labour Office (powiatowy urząd pracy—PUP) for the City of Toruń 10 persons worked, 2 persons were re-registered as unemployed, 2 persons were excluded from the register due to their non-appearance, and 1 person worked until 20 December 2018, but did not register again;
- 9 people worked in the PUP in Włocławek, 5 people were registered as unemployed and 1 was ill and not registered;
- 5 people worked in the PUP in Grudziądz, 3 people reached retirement age, 6 people were registered as unemployed and 1 did not remain in the registers.

Employment effectiveness at the level of 53% was achieved, which proves the effectiveness of the proposed strategies.

A good practice presented in the article confirms that employment services have the potential to effectively activate older people. It is important that interventions towards the unemployed aged 50+ are undertaken immediately after registration, as this group is extremely susceptible to a drop in motivation and early withdrawal from the labour market. Working with older people—especially at the counselling stage—requires more time, frequent and regular contact between the client and the counsellor, the use of soft and hard diagnostic methods and the use of traditional and innovative methods of forms of professional activation. In order to enable even better adjustment of aid to the needs of the unemployed in older age, it was postulated that the catalogue of innovative activities should be expanded to include: counselling and purchase of clothing suitable for job interviews, exercise/rehabilitation, fitness or cultural-educational activities. It was also stressed that care should be taken to ensure the correct order of use of non-standard forms of support, e.g. image support through the use of hairdressing services, visage, photographer and the development of a professional CV, video CV should take place in the initial or central phase, and not in the final phase of the implementation of the activation programme. It is also necessary to plan individual activation strategies

in such a way that there is no accumulation of several forms of support in one period of time.

Professional activation based on an individual approach could become a common practice in the Polish labour market policy. For this to happen, legislative changes are needed to allow for a more flexible way of operating public employment services, a more personalised selection of labour market instruments and services and organisational improvements in the work of public offices.

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### ***Indywidualne podejście do aktywizacji zawodowej bezrobotnych w wieku 50+ w ocenie pracowników publicznych służb zatrudnienia—wnioski z badania***

#### ***Streszczenie***

Celem artykułu jest ocena innowacyjnej strategii aktywizacji zawodowej starszych bezrobotnych, opierającej się na zastosowaniu w pracy z klientem 50+ indywidualnego podejścia i niestandardowych form pomocy, koncepcji przygotowanej na podstawie niemieckich rozwiązań, którą zastosowano w Polsce po raz pierwszy. Materiał badawczy został zebrany za

pomocą wywiadów kwestionariuszowych z użyciem kwestionariusza drukowanego (PAPI), które przeprowadzono z doradcami zawodowymi zatrudnionymi w wybranych powiatowych urzędach pracy, testującymi innowacyjne rozwiązanie w ramach ponadnarodowego projektu POWER pn. *IMPULS 50+. Strategie aktywizacji zawodowej osób starszych dla Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia*. W ocenie badanych opracowana koncepcja aktywizacji zawodowej pozwala skutecznie i trwale integrować bezrobotnych w starszym wieku z rynkiem pracy. Za szczególnie przydatne instrumenty aktywizacji o charakterze innowacyjnym uznano indywidualny coaching, profilaktykę zdrowotną i zachęty finansowe.

**Słowa kluczowe:** bezrobotni 50+, aktywizacja zawodowa, indywidualne podejście, publiczne służby zatrudnienia