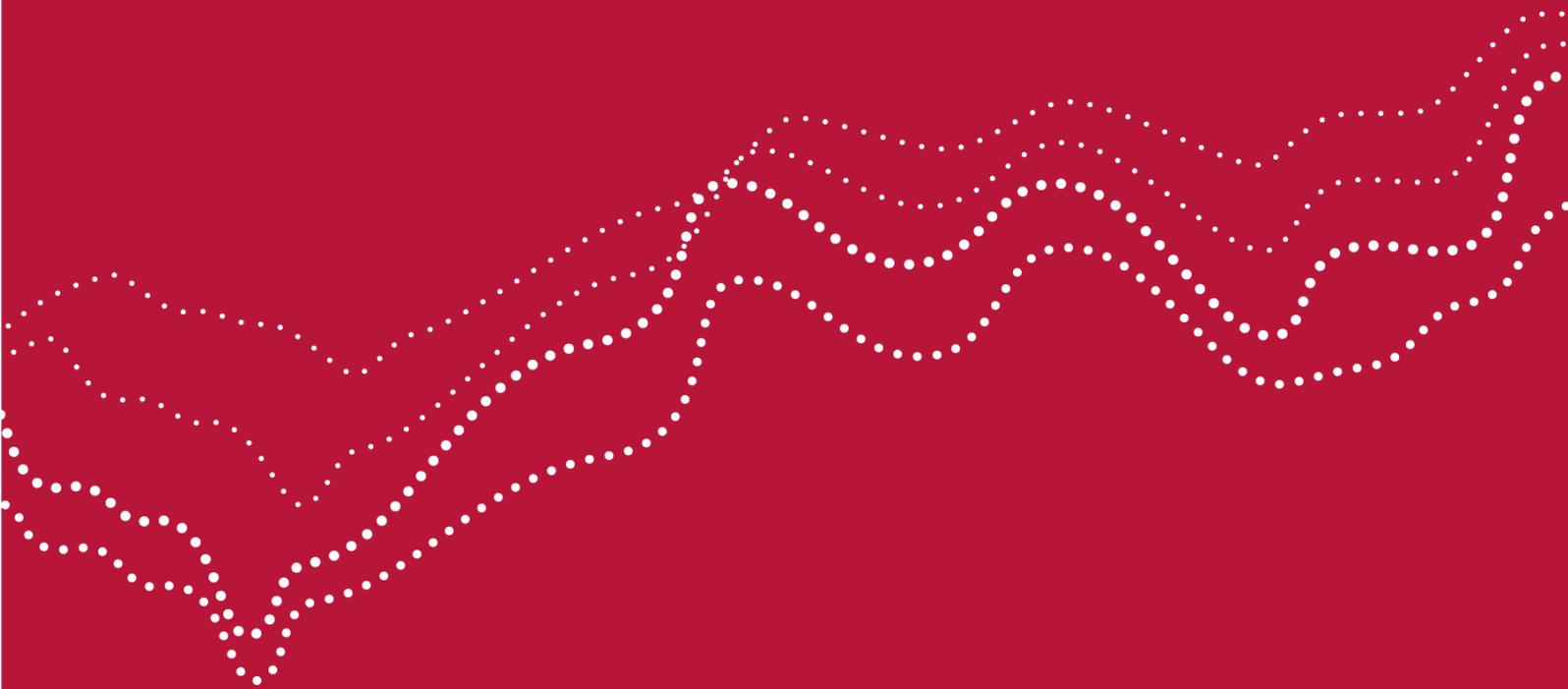


# Outreach activities of public employment services in Poland

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MATEUSZ SMOTER



## Outreach activities of public employment services in Poland

### ABSTRACT

Young people not in education, employment, or training (so-called NEETs) rarely register with public employment services, which means that they cannot benefit from the support employment offices can provide. NEETs are often unaware of the projects that are implemented by employment offices. In addition, these young people tend to have a negative perception of the activities of employment offices, and they are often reluctant to register as unemployed for fear of being stigmatised. At the same time, because employment offices engage in only modest promotional activities, information about the support they can provide does not reach some potential beneficiaries. The employment offices rarely use modern channels of communication to reach young people, and they seldom cooperate with local institutions or engage in outreach efforts in rural areas that are far from their respective offices. Thus, the support they offer is promoted to a limited extent only. To increase their outreach, public employment services could intensify and diversify their informational and promotional activities by, for example, actively participating in local events, growing their presence in areas further away from their respective offices, and expanding their networks of cooperation to include institutions that provide assistance to young people needing special support to enter the labour market. Permanent and systematic cooperation with schools, which is currently temporary in nature, can also play a significant role in expanding the outreach of public employment services to NEETs.

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## Introduction

Public employment services (PES) are the primary public institutions that support the unemployed in finding employment. They are also the main agents of the Youth Guarantee, the most important of the European Union programmes aimed at supporting young people in entering the labour market, which Poland has been participating in since 2014. Most of the services provided by the public employment services require individuals to register as unemployed. However, many people who are unemployed do not register with an employment office. Of the young people in Poland who are not in education, employment, or training (so-called NEETs), only around one-quarter are receiving support from the PES.

The aim of this report is to explain why the majority of young, unemployed people in Poland remain outside the PES registers. The study also looks at how public employment services intend to reach these young people. For example, do the employment offices work directly in places where NEETs are likely to be found (e.g., in schools, social welfare centres)? Do they promote their services during local events? Are they able to reach young people living in rural areas who may have limited access to the nearest office? Such methods have been used successfully by public employment services in other European Union countries, although they remain uncommon (Mosley et al. 2018).

Unemployment, especially at a young age, can have far-reaching consequences. Research has shown that unemployment has a negative impact on quality of life, self-esteem, health, and social relations. People who experience long-term unemployment or professional inactivity early on are less likely to return to work and have higher earnings at future life stages. In addition, if they do not make pension contributions, the unemployed will also be in a worse situation when they retire (OECD, 2016). For those reasons, providing support for the widest possible group of unemployed people is of paramount importance.

The report shows that the low percentage of young people registering with employment offices can be attributed to reasons related to both the unemployed and the PES. The unemployed often lack knowledge about the offices' activities or see these activities as ineffective; or they are afraid to register as unemployed for fear of stigmatisation. At the same time, because the public employment services engage in only modest promotional activities, the information about the support they can provide fails to reach some potential beneficiaries. The public employment offices rarely use modern channels of communication (e.g., social media); they seldom cooperate with local institutions or engage in outreach efforts in rural areas that are far from their respective offices; and they promote their services to a limited extent only. In addition, there are formal barriers that prevent members of certain groups from registering as unemployed, such as farmers,

people receiving various forms of social welfare benefits, or disabled people receiving pension benefits.

The following data were used in the study: data from the Labour Force Survey, administrative data on registered unemployment, administrative data on the activities of public employment services, and data from an online survey (CAWI – computer-assisted web interview) that was sent to all employment offices in Poland.

The first chapter presents statistics on the young people receiving support from the employment offices. The second chapter discusses the reasons why so few NEETs register as unemployed. The third chapter describes the efforts made by the employment offices to promote and disseminate information about the support they can provide.

## 1. How many people do public employment services reach?

**Public employment services are the most important public institutions that provide support to young people seeking to enter the labour market, as they work directly with the unemployed.** They are also the main agents that are implementing the Youth Guarantee (YG), which is among the most important European Union programmes aimed at helping young people participate in the labour market. The YG was launched in 2014 in response to the financial and economic crisis of 2007/2008, which hit young people particularly hard. Among the young people who received support from the YG, more than 90% accessed it through employment offices (Magda et. al 2020). While other institutions also offer support from the YG, including the Volunteer Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy*)<sup>1</sup> and non-governmental organisations or training institutions, their reach is limited. This is why the activities of the employment offices are so important.

**Nine out of 10 participants in the Youth Guarantee programmes took part in projects run by employment offices.**



**The problem is that most young people who are not in education, employment, or training do not take advantage of the support offered by employment offices.** In order to receive this support, an individual needs to register as unemployed. In Poland, around 12% of young people aged 15-29 (approx. 730,000 people) are in the NEET group. Over half a million of these young people (approx. 74%) are not registered with an employment office. Broken down by region, we can see that the share of NEETs who are registered with an employment office ranges from 19% in the Dolnośląskie, Opolskie, and Pomorskie voivodeships<sup>2</sup> to 36% in the Podlaskie voivodeship. Thus, these figures indicate that in all

<sup>1</sup> Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy (Voluntary Labour Corps) is a state entity that supports young people aged 15-25 in finding a job, gaining qualifications, and fulfilling their compulsory education requirements. In addition to engaging in employment support activities, it also implements care and educational programmes, especially for disadvantaged youth from dysfunctional environments.

<sup>2</sup> The administrative division of Poland is based on three levels of subdivision. Poland is divided into voivodeships (provinces); voivodeships are further divided into powiats (counties or districts); and powiats are, in turn, divided into gminas (communes or municipalities). Poland currently has 16 voivodeships, 380 powiats, and app. 2,500 gminas.

voivodeships, more than half of young NEETs are not being reached by the employment offices.

### Fewer than three out of 10 young NEETs benefit from the support of employment offices



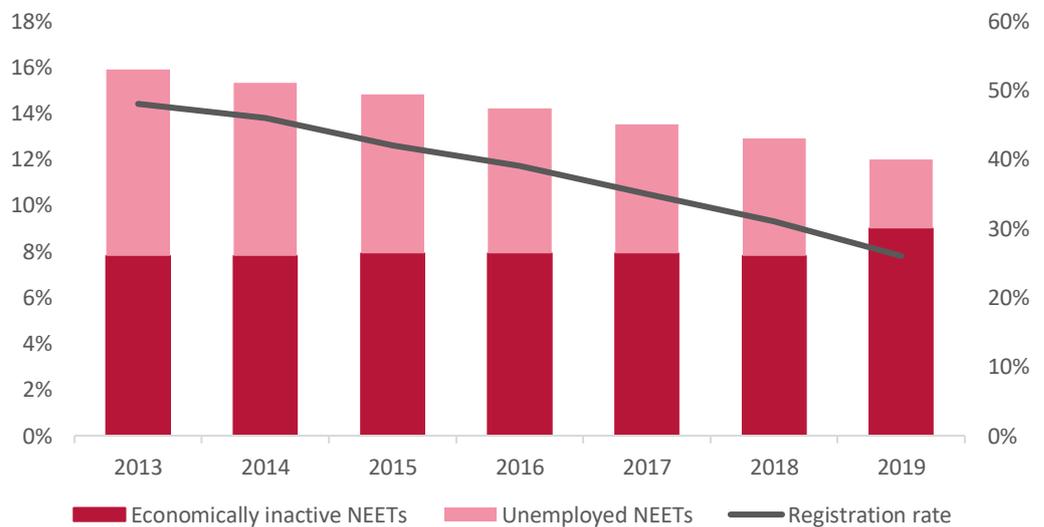
**Employment office employees find it particularly difficult to reach economically inactive people.** The likelihood that a person will register with the PES is strongly related to his/her labour market status. Of the unemployed (those who are not working but are seeking employment), 55% are receiving support from the PES. However, most young NEETs (76%) are economically inactive; i.e., they are not working and are not looking for a job. Of the people in this group, only 16% are in the employment office registers. Interestingly, the coverage rate of the PES has been decreasing year after year. This trend does not indicate that the public employment services are becoming less effective. It can mainly be attributed to the evolving structure of the NEET group: i.e., as the economic situation improves, the percentage of the population who are unemployed decreases, while the percentage of the population who are economically inactive has been increasing slightly over the last few years. It is primarily these economically inactive people who remain unregistered. A significant share of the economically inactive NEETs are women who have withdrawn from the labour market due to care and family responsibilities (83% of women in the NEET group cited these reasons). Another large group of the economically inactive NEETs are individuals who are currently not working due to illness or disability, or who have withdrawn from the labour market due to poor health (19%). However, as almost 40% of these economically inactive NEETs have said that they are willing to work, they are often referred to as the labour market's hidden potential. Reaching out to these people as early as possible may prevent them from having long-term spells of unemployment or inactivity.

Table 1. Percentage of young people not working or in education (NEET) who are registered with an employment office

	Registration with an employment office	
	Yes	No
Total NEET	26.2%	73.8%
NEET unemployed (jobseekers)	55.4%	44.6%
NEET professionally inactive, by cause of inactivity:	16.6%	83.4%
– discouragement	32.4%	67.6%
– family reasons and providing care	19.2%	80.8%
– illness, disability	3.0%	97.0%
– other	5.8%	94.2%

Source: Own work based on data from the Labour Force Survey for Poland for 2019.

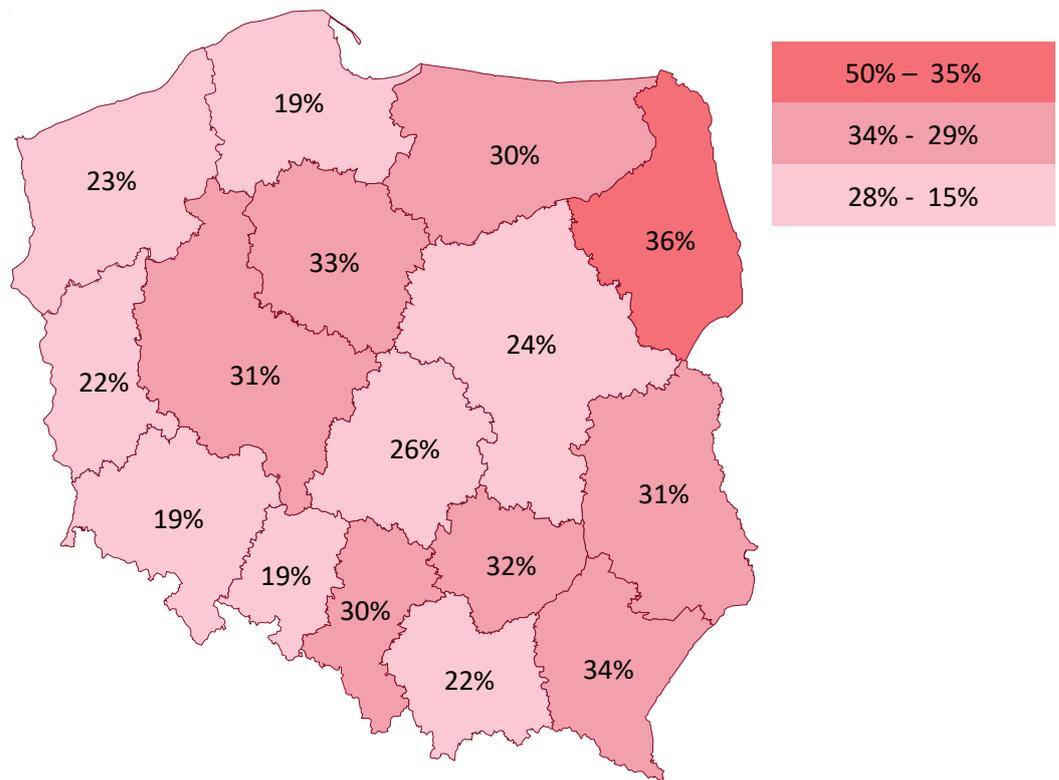
Chart 1. Young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) aged 18–19, by their labour market status (left axis), versus the percentage of NEETs registered with an employment office (right axis).



Source: Own work based on data from the Labour Force Survey for Poland for 2013–2019.

Map 1. Regional differences in employment office registrations

Percentage of people in the NEET group registered with an employment office



Note: The calculation includes people aged 18–29, as younger people cannot register as unemployed with an employment office.

Source: Own work based on data from the Labour Force Survey for Poland for 2019.

## 2. Why don't young unemployed people register with an employment office?

**Some people are afraid of the stigma associated with being “officially” unemployed.** For many unemployed people in Poland, registering with an employment office is associated with shame, ineptitude, and weakness. Thus, for some people, admitting that they are unemployed is seen as a sign of failure, and registering as unemployed forces them to acknowledge a reality that they had been repressing. Previous research has shown that unemployed people often do not want to talk about their situation with others, and are afraid of being judged. Therefore, they tend to first seek work on their own, and register with the PES only after other methods have failed (Błądowski et al. 2020).

**Employment offices, their employees, and clients do not have a good reputation.** Many people see the PES as ineffective, bureaucratic institutions that only have lower-quality job offers. These stereotypes also apply to officials, who are often perceived as being not very helpful and generally unfriendly (Błądowski et al. 2020).

**People who live in a rural area that is located far away from the nearest employment office may have problems using the PES.** Individuals who register as unemployed have to come into the office at certain times (usually in the morning or in the early afternoon) not only for the purposes of registration, but also for periodic compulsory visits. People who lack their own means of transport, or who live in an area with a poorly developed public transport network, may find it difficult to get to the office. In addition, as their travel costs are not always reimbursed, some unemployed individuals simply cannot afford to visit the office (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2016).

**Some people cannot register with an employment office for formal reasons.** For example, farmers, individuals who receive some forms of welfare benefits, and disabled people who receive disability pension benefits are not permitted to register as unemployed.<sup>3</sup> According to data from the Labour Force Survey, social benefits constitute the main source of income for more than one-third of young people in Poland who are neither working nor studying. The percentage of NEETs who are registered with an employment office is 16 pp. lower among those who list welfare benefits as their main source of income (16%) than it is among those who report that they have a different main source of income (32%). **The low percentage of NEETs who register with the PES may also be attributable to their lack of knowledge about the services provided by employment offices.** In the next part of the report, we show that the employment offices engage in only modest promotional activities, and rarely use modern channels of

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<sup>3</sup> The full list of conditions necessary to register as an unemployed person can be found in the Act of 20 April 2004 on employment promotion and labour market institutions.

communication to reach potential beneficiaries (e.g., social media). In addition, the offices seldom cooperate with local institutions, or engage in outreach efforts in rural areas that are far from their respective offices. Thus, the information about the support the PES can provide fails to reach some beneficiaries.

*Frame 1. Opinions of the unemployed on employment offices as per their diaries*

*This is why you have to swallow your pride and, as much as it hurts and humiliates me, I have to go and do all the paperwork. Be unemployed officially now. Nobody understands what level of dishonour this is, and also to be at the mercy of others.*

*I'm unemployed. I've only just received the document, but it feels like it's been tattooed right in the middle of my forehead. In a way, this a confirmation of what I've been carrying within me for many months [...] Unemployment with official confirmation of the fact, as well as what I experienced earlier, is exactly the same state, in which the dominant feeling was the shame I felt due to my own helplessness. It's a shame to be such an inconsequential person that nobody wants to hire me.*

*The very term "employment office" was like a slap in the face, because it's an unemployed office, really, not an employment one [...] Until I wasn't formally unemployed, I wasn't unemployed at all. After all, I was still doing something – looking for work and a way to fix the world is quite a job, isn't it?*

*Having devoted time to the children, I started looking for a job on my own. Registering with an employment office was considered a faux pas in in our social circle in 2015, so I kept checking the advertisements and sending my CV together with memorable cover letters... [...] At the beginning of 2015, I wasn't thinking of registering with the employment office. I wasn't even interested in the procedures there. All the time I was being told about the losers who needed such help. But, well, the jokes are done and over with. I thought the employment office would help me. Somehow I managed to hide my shame in front of my friends just by avoiding the subject as if it was the plague*

*I was given benefits, but this led to my removal from the employment office. Administrative absurdity means that social welfare benefits are considered income, so if I have monthly income, I cannot be unemployed. Even though I am still one.. Unexpectedly, I also lost the option to obtain further free courses from the employment office and I still had no job, even though I was not formally unemployed*

Source: Błędowski P., Kubicki P., Pośluszny Ł., Oficyna Wydawnicza (Szkola Główna Handlowa; Warszawa), 2019. Pamiętniki bezrobotnych. T. 1, SGH. Oficyna Wydawnicza, Warszawa

### 3. How do employment offices reach unregistered people?

*This part of the report was based on data from the web survey carried out among employment offices in Poland in December 2019. The completed questionnaire was returned by 272 offices (80%). Prior to the main study, a pilot was implemented among 6 randomly selected offices, aimed at verifying that the questions were structured in a manner that was understandable and clear for the respondents. The survey asked about activities conducted between December 2018 and December 2019.*

**Most employment offices (86%) reported organising job or education fairs.** These fairs were open events in which jobseekers were invited to meet employers as well as representatives of training institutions, schools, and universities in person. During the survey period, these fairs were usually held once or twice a year. Around 60% were organised in partnership with other institutions, such as local authorities or educational institutions (schools, universities). The percentage of offices that organised fairs was similar across the regions.

**Just over half of employment offices (54%) reported promoting their services at local events. Such activities were, however, quite rare.** Promoting projects and programmes during local events was one of the approaches the employment offices indicated that they used to reach potential beneficiaries. For example, they reported being present at city/municipal days, local sports and cultural events, local fairs, festivals, and open days held by local institutions. Some regional variation was observed. For example, all of the surveyed employment offices in the Opolskie voivodeship, but only four out of 11 in the Świętokrzyskie voivodeship, said that they promoted their services at local events (10/10). However, participation in such activities was relatively rare, as these events generally took place only once or twice a year.

**One in five employment offices (20%) had an electronic service point with local job offers (called an info-stand), and 6% of offices had an electronic service point that allowed jobseekers to create their own CV and send it directly to the employer.** Such points were usually installed in local public institutions (e.g., town/municipal office, town library, communal social welfare centre, etc.). These devices allowed jobseekers to view the job offers available at the office and to print them out; and, in some cases, to create a CV and send it directly to the employer listed in the office's database.

**One in 10 employment offices (11%) ran local information and consultation points.** These points were usually located in local public institutions (e.g., a municipal office or a library), and were used to carry out tasks such as providing job placement, vocational counselling, or assistance in active job searches. These operations were ongoing, or made

up a share of the working hours of employment office employees on specific dates (e.g., several times a month).

### Cooperation with schools

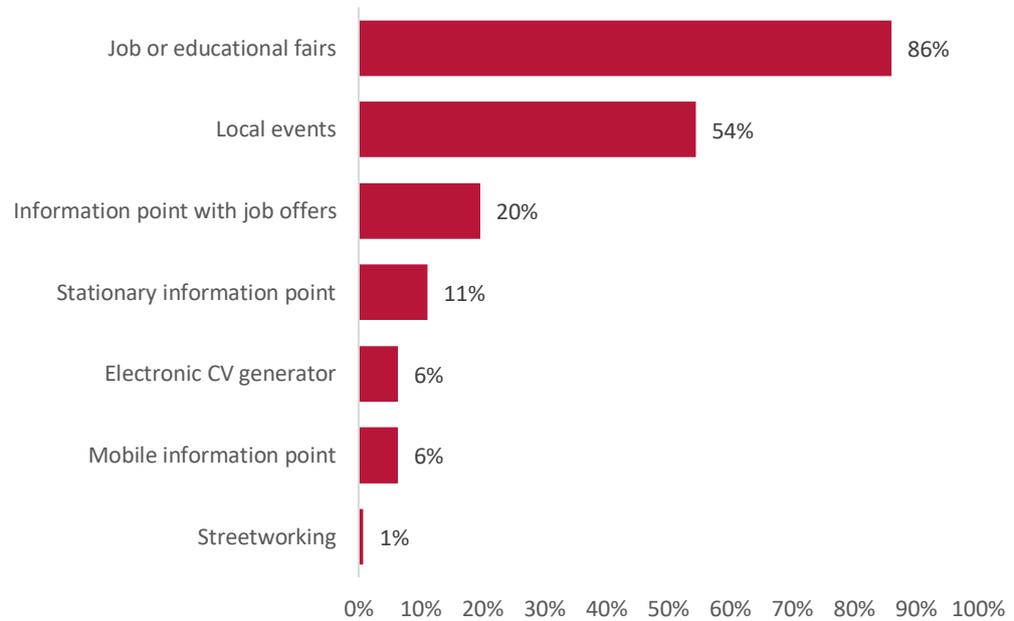
**A few offices (6%) used mobile information points (e.g., a minibus) that made it possible to reach people living in rural areas.** This solution allowed career counsellors to provide services, regardless of the jobseekers' place of residence. These mobile points made it easier for people living far away from the nearest employment office to access career counselling services, information about the local labour market, or training courses and workshops.

**Street work, which refers to work outside of an institution in the environment of the potential beneficiaries (e.g., homeless people, addicts, difficult-to-reach youth), was hardly used by the employment offices surveyed.** To engage in street work, properly prepared and trained employees must be willing to go to places where people at risk may be found, such as the streets, clubs, and certain urban neighbourhoods. This method depends on close cooperation with the beneficiaries in their environment on their terms, and at a pace adapted to their individual needs and possibilities. Only 1% of employment offices reported using this method for working with young unemployed people.

**Most employment offices (90%) organised meetings with students from local schools. Job counsellors reached out to young people at all educational levels. The frequency of such meetings was, nevertheless, limited.** Most of these meetings (82%) were with high school students. About two-thirds of offices also organised meetings with primary and middle school students. On such occasions, the officials mainly discussed the local labour market situation, provided information about the support available at the office, and provided individual consultations to interested parties about professional issues. Just over half of the offices were meeting with students five or more times a year, while slightly more than 20% were meeting with students one to two times a year. The school's request for a meeting was the main reason for such meetings being organised.

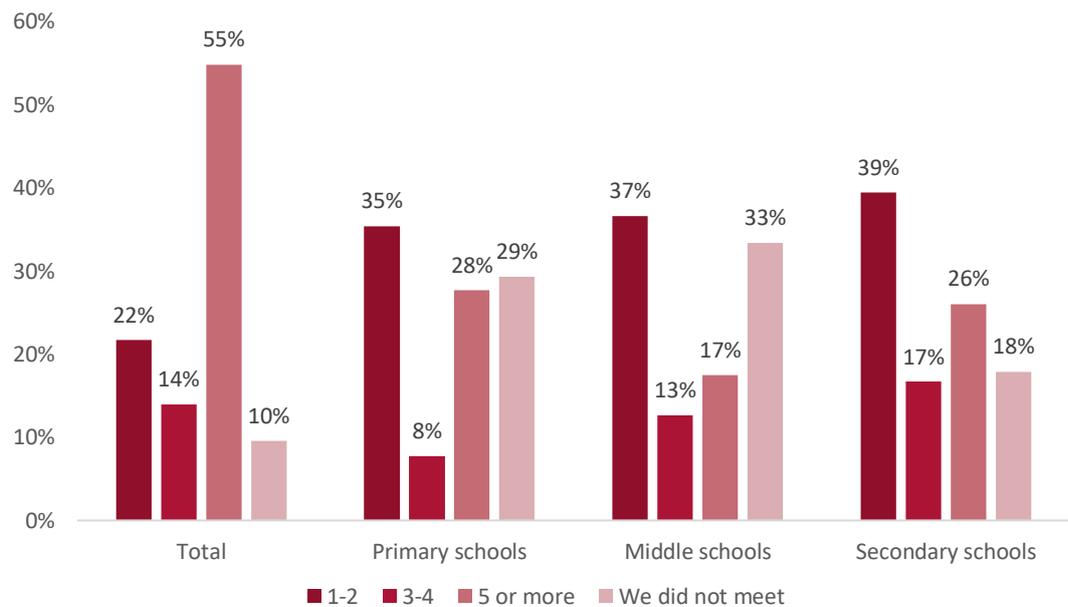
**The PES offices did not report collaborating with schools in monitoring students who were at risk of social exclusion, or who had not fulfilled their compulsory educational requirements.** Less than 2% of the PES offices stated that they had engaged in these forms of cooperation. This low share may be due to the personal data protection measures that limit schools and educational institutions in sharing information about students at risk with public employment services.

Chart 2. Means of promotion of employment support by employment offices



Source: Own work based on a CAWI survey among employment offices. N=272.

Chart 3. Percentage of employment offices that organised meetings with students from local schools, and the frequency of such meetings during the year

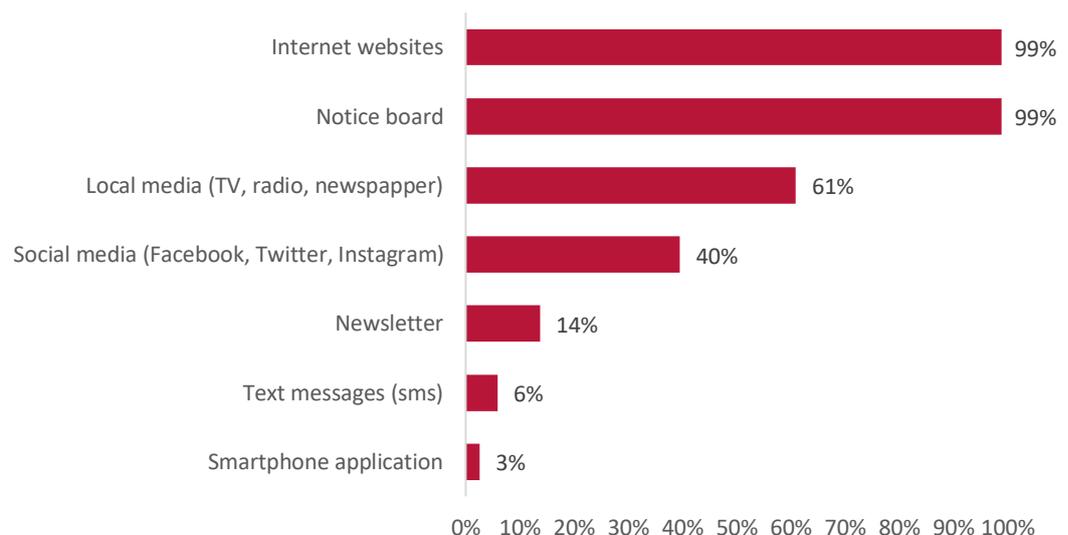


Source: Own work based on a CAWI survey among employment offices. N=272.

**Employment offices promoted their support services mainly via traditional methods, and rarely used modern forms of communication.** Almost all of the offices reported that they promoted their support services on the notice board at their premises or on websites. 40% offices promoted their services on social media, even though social media are often used by young people. According to the employment offices surveyed, 17% of their employees were using private social media accounts to promote the PES’ projects and programmes. Moreover, the offices’ promotional activities very rarely involved e-mail newsletters or text messages.

**The effectiveness of promotional activities was rarely monitored (23%).** Thus, most of the employment offices surveyed were not analysing who was receiving their information, what the reach of their promotional activities was, or how different target groups were receiving their messages.

Chart 4. Promotional channels used by employment offices



Source: Own work based on a CAWI survey among employment offices. N=272.

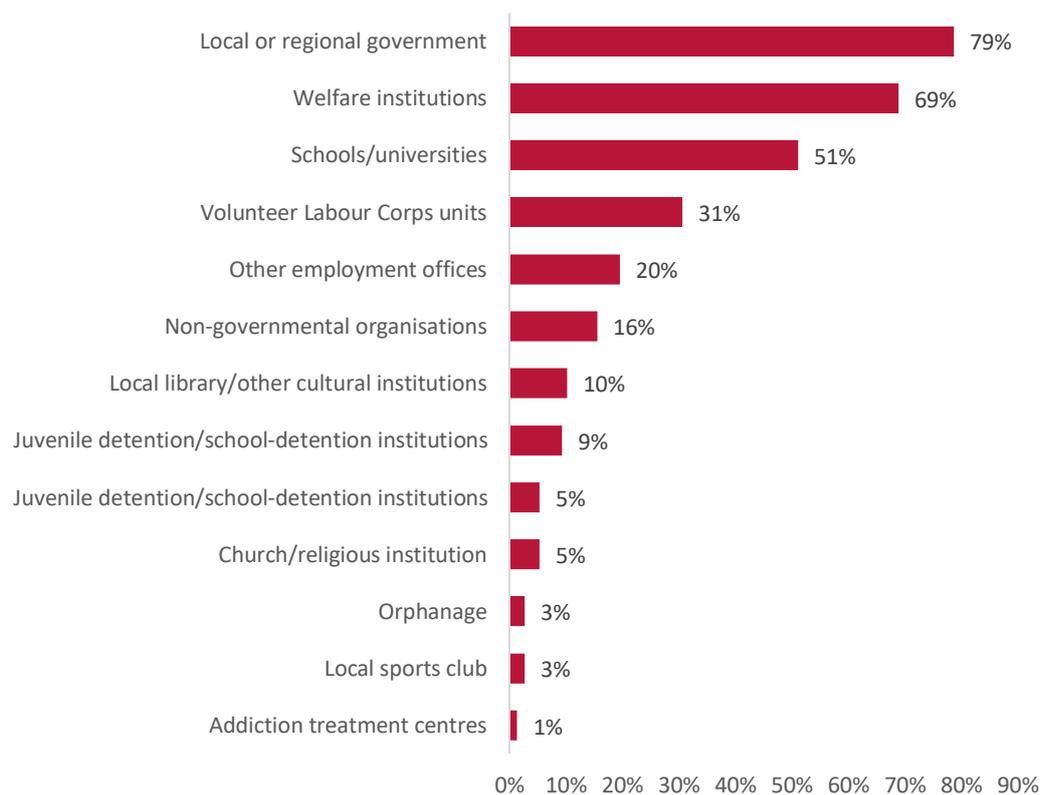
### Cooperation with other institutions

**Employment offices’ informational and promotional activities mainly involved cooperation with local authorities and social welfare institutions.** It was at such institutions that the employment offices were most likely to place their informational materials (posters/brochures/leaflets) or to present their activities in person. In total, 82% of the employment offices reported that they had placed promotional materials at other institutions, while 85% indicated that their employees had personally offered their services at these institutions. Promotional materials were rarely placed or presented in person at non-governmental organisations, at local cultural and sports centres, or at

institutions where young people requiring special support were likely to be found (e.g., in prisons, centres for addicts, orphanages, re-education centres).

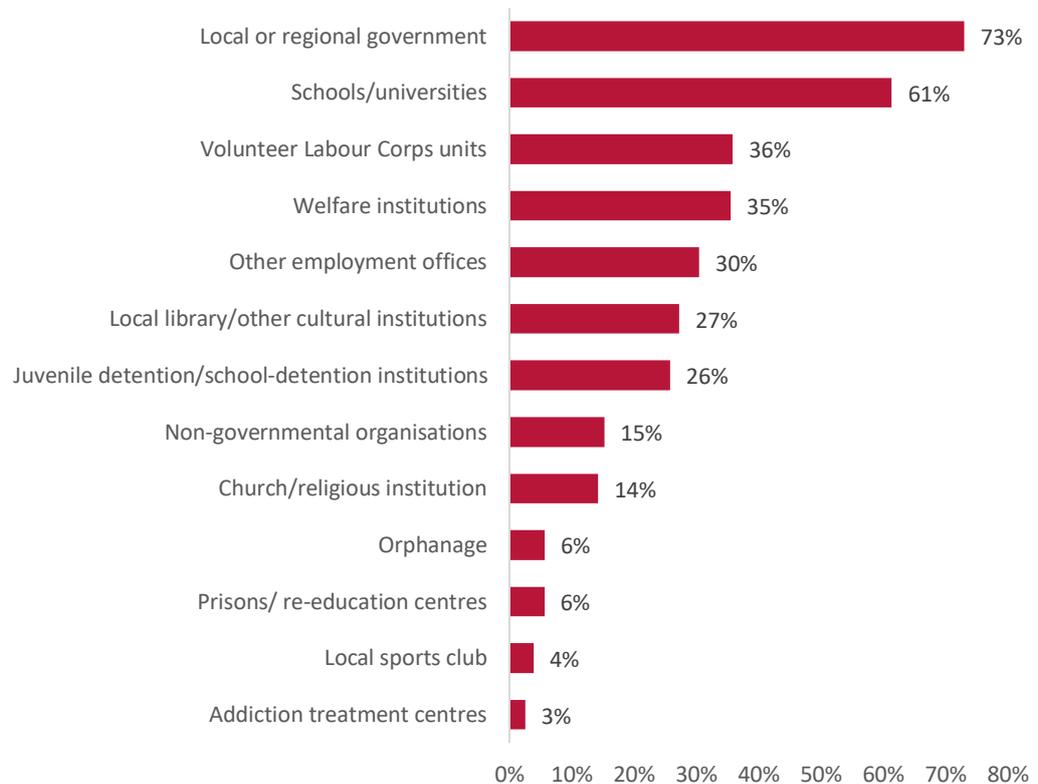
**Inter-institutional cooperation, in the form of joint projects, was rare** (in 29% of cases). The cooperation of employment offices with organisations engaged in social welfare policy is of particular importance, as these institutions often have the same clients as the PES. Nonetheless, the administrative data also showed that such inter-institutional cooperation tends to be rare, even though there have been legal solutions aimed at facilitating cooperation between employment services and social welfare centres since 2014 (MRPiPS, 2017).

*Chart 5. Percentage of employment offices placing informational materials (posters/leaflets/brochures) at other institutions*



Source: Own work based on a CAWI survey among employment offices. N=272.

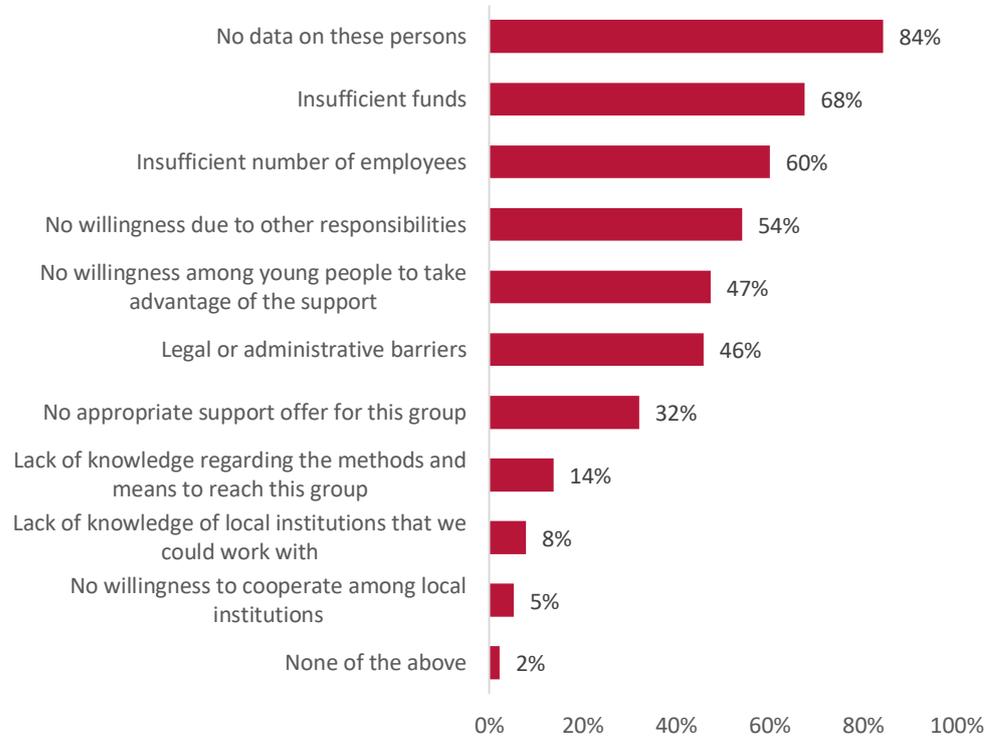
Chart 6. Percentage of employment offices reporting that their employees had personally presented employment support services at other institutions



Source: Own work based on a CAWI survey among employment offices. N=272.

The local PES offices cited the lack of data about unregistered persons as the main barrier to effective outreach activities (84%). There is currently no single central database of young people who are outside the labour market, and who are not registered with the employment offices. Data on these individuals are scattered, and can be found in part at various locations, such as at social welfare institutions, schools, re-education centres, and non-governmental organisations. Gaining access to such information is difficult due to personal data protection measures. The lack of funds for outreach activities was also cited as an obstacle relatively often (68%) by the PES offices. However, it is important to note that a significant share of the actions that could increase the outreach of public employment services do not require substantial financial outlays. Nonetheless, these actions do require active employee involvement, and staff shortages coupled with other work burdens were reported by 60% and 54% of the employment offices, respectively. Among the least often indicated barriers were lack of knowledge on outreach methods (14%), lack of knowledge on local institutions that PES could cooperate with (8%) or lack of willingness among local institutions to cooperate (5%).

Chart 7. Factors that make it more difficult to reach and provide support to young people not registered with an employment office



Source: Own work based on a CAWI survey among employment offices. N=268

## Conclusions and summary

The finding that only a small share of young people from the NEET group in Poland are registered with an employment office can be attributed to a number of factors. First, many of these young people are simply not interested in the job offers or programmes provided by the public employment services. As most young NEETs are either not looking for employment or are unable to work due to their life situation, they usually do not seek to register as unemployed. However, some people will, after a certain period of time (e.g., a break in work related to raising children), want to return to the labour market. Indeed, as around 40% of economically inactive NEETs have said they are willing to work even though they are not currently looking for employment, the potential to provide them with support is high. Furthermore, it appears that some unemployed people avoid registering with an employment office for psychological reasons, and use other job search methods instead. Moreover, survey data indicate that the employment offices employ few active information and promotional measures. Thus, it appears that PES employees rarely leave the office; that the networks of institutions employment offices cooperate with are relatively narrow; and that few offices are involved in permanent or organised forms of cooperation (e.g., with schools).

To increase their outreach and the scale of their impact, employment offices should seek to increase and diversify their externally directed information and promotional activities. While some employment offices do undertake such activities, it appears that such practices are relatively rare and isolated. Actively participating in local events, moving into areas that are further away from the office (whether through the use of mobile points or stationary points where officials provide counselling), and expanding their network of cooperating organisations by including institutions in which young people who require special support to enter the labour market may be found (prisons, re-education centres) are just some of the potential solutions offices should consider. Employment offices should also seek to establish permanent and systematic cooperative relationships with schools, which currently tend to be temporary in nature. Another issue the employment offices face is how to adapt their services to the needs and the abilities of economically inactive people. Currently, these individuals are not finding the services offered by employment offices attractive.

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