

# The process of planning public policies on the example of policies concerning the elderly living in rural areas

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## Abstract

Treating social policy as one of the public policies, we can understand it as a broad commitment of the public authority to meet selected social needs, which include, for example, social security, health care services, social assistance, or education. Currently, it is possible to distinguish three levels of implementing public policies: programme choices, implementing public programmes, and results of public actions. This work will handle the first level, which is represented by politicians and officials at individual levels of public authority: central authority, which will be represented by government documents, regional authority (at the level of a voivodeship self-government), and local authority implemented by a poviát and municipality. Programme documents represent the broad interest of politicians in the challenge of old age in public space. A significant level of generality, even though coherent with the directions for improving the quality of life of older people indicated by science, combined with a lack of a system for monitoring policies at individual levels, results in that both politicians and officials dealing with the issue of old age in rural areas still have a lot to do.

**Keywords:** programming of public policies, self-government, old age, countryside.

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## Introduction

In modern science, public policy serves to give order to public tasks, starting with designing them, through implementation, up to evaluating results. We can define it as a set of processes undertaken by the public administration as part of the mission of satisfying social needs. The main objective of public policy research is to support the creators of public reality with their knowledge resulting from research that verifies the content of these policies. These policies include primarily the country's development, i.e. improving its international position and security, competitiveness, increasing its potential and resources, as well as solving social, educational, economic, or health issues, especially where it is important for citizens and institutions performing public tasks<sup>1</sup>.

The field of interest for public policy sciences includes issues aimed at recognizing and understanding the mechanisms of making choices and public decision-making, as well as the related implementation conditions. For this reason, this science is multidisciplinary, is focused on the problem and its contextual location, as well as possesses a normative orientation<sup>2</sup>.

Treating social policy as one of the public policies, we can understand it as a broad commitment of the public authority to meet selected social needs, which include, for example, social security, health care services, social assistance, or education<sup>3</sup>. We can also treat it as a broad set of principles and actions that determine the manner of distributing and controlling a certain level of prosperity, implemented through political actions, which in this case are normative in nature<sup>4</sup>. Looking at the catalogue of social problems that are solved by public authorities, for example within the social assistance system, we can see that some are only underlined (such as the issue of old age, which in itself is not a reason for providing social assistance<sup>5</sup>), while for others a quite broad instrument was built (including the system of social assistance benefits addressed to the unemployed). That is because, it is not a feature

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1. J. Woźnicki, *Nowa dyscyplina – "nauki o polityce publicznej" usytuowana w dziedzinie nauk społecznych*, "Nauka" 2012, nr 1, p. 134–135.

2. S. Mazur, *Status teoretyczno-metodologiczny badań nad politykami publicznymi*, "Wrocławskie Studia Politologiczne" 2015, nr 18, p. 8.

3. L. Dziewięcka-Bokun, *O sposobach rozumienia polityki społecznej* [in:] *Uwarunkowania współczesnej polityki społecznej*, red. B. Ponikowski, J. Zarzeczny, Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2002, p. 63.

4. F. Villa, *Polityka społeczna, demokracja i praca socjalna*, compilation M. Bocheńska-Seweryn, K. Kluzowa, Kraków, Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1997, p. 12; cf. P. Donati, *Frontiere della politica sociale*, Angeli, Milano 1987, p. 37.

5. Ustawa z 12 marca 2004 r. o pomocy społecznej, Dz. U. 2004 nr 64 poz. 593.

of public authority to solve all problems faced by citizens. However, this is not due to the reluctance of public authorities to address specific issues, but rather to the need to set priorities. The selection of priorities/social issues is determined by at least several factors:

- presence on the public agenda – resulting partially due to the severity of the issue and its scale;
- the interest of the public in a given issue;
- an interest of interest groups and lobbyists (including academia and NGOs)<sup>6</sup>.

Other, seemingly significant factors include a situation in which market mechanisms fail and the state or other public authority must intervene in the process of solving a given problem<sup>7</sup>. Building an agenda, meaning defining a public problem, may include three levels:

- universal – the agenda includes all ideas and concepts within a given public issue (diagnosis – solution);
- systemic – addressed to politicians and intends to shape awareness concerning a given problem;
- institutional – includes a given territory and/or selected entities<sup>8</sup>.

The process of creating public policy is essentially limited to legislating, which becomes a framework for following activities carried out by individual public life entities<sup>9</sup>. Of course, one cannot forget about other tools that can be used in terms of this process, such as: cooperation, argumentation, debating, shaping positive incentives to adopt the expected attitudes, implementing indicators of effectiveness of activities or conducting evaluation<sup>10</sup>. Currently, three implementation levels of public policies are distinguished: programme choices, implementing public programs, and the results of public actions<sup>11</sup>.

The following work will concern the first level, which is carried out by politicians and officials, at least at several levels of public authority, i.e. central, regional, and local authorities. The aim of this article is to assess the process of planning public policy towards the elderly basing on selected documents, with particular emphasis on the situation of rural residents. The national perspective is complemented by a look

6. A. Zybała, *Polityki publiczne*, KSAP, Warsaw 2012, p. 47–60.

7. D. Kozaczka, *Polityki publiczne jako proces*, "Zoon Politikon", 2016, p. 325.

8. T.A. Birkland, *Agenda Setting in Public Policy* [in:] *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis. Theory, Politics and Methods*, ed. F. Fischer et al., CRC Press 2007, p. 63.

9. A. Zybała, *Polityka publiczna wobec teorii i jej praktyki w Polsce*, "Wrocławskie Studia Politologiczne" 2015, nr 18, p. 29.

10. I. Izebski, *Realizacja polityk publicznych przez administrację publiczną*, "Zeszyty Naukowe KUL" 2018, nr 1(241), p. 222.

11. M. Jęczarek, *Jednostki samorządu terytorialnego podmioty wewnętrzne czy zewnętrzne polityk publicznych*, "Polityka i Społeczeństwo" 2016, nr 3(14), p. 52.

at the sources, i.e. international decisions creating senior policies. Choosing the target of the analysis is not accidental. Older people constitute an increasingly large social group. It is estimated that by 2050 the share of people older than 65 years of age will exceed 28% of the EU's population in general, and according to forecasts concerning Poland this figure may reach 34%. Taking into consideration the current demographic trends, we can assume that every third inhabitant of a rural area will then be 65 years old or older. This also means an increase in the age heterogeneity of this group, entailing various needs<sup>12</sup> that should be recognised in the process of public policy programming. 2,971,545 people of post-working age (1,042,271 men and 1,929,274 women) lived in the Polish countryside at the end of 2021, which constituted over 34% of the total population of elderly people (8,529,663)<sup>13</sup>. In terms of the analysis, a review of national documents has been carried out, concerning seniority policy, regional documents, and programme documents at the local (poviat and municipal) level from the Silesian voivodeship, which is the closest to the author's research activity so far.

### At the source – in the perspective of international documents

During old age a person is exposed to at least a few of the commonly occurring social risks (deteriorating health/old age diseases, insufficient income, lack of shelter, life dependency). By risk, we mean the danger of an occurrence of a future event, uncertain, independent of a person's will and unfavourable for that person. Risk always affects a specific person, and often also that person's family. While the state constructs extensive social security systems that guarantee security in a fairly narrow socio-economic sense, these activities are aimed at reducing and compensating for commonly occurring losses. However, they are not able to predict all situations that a given person will face<sup>14</sup>, hence in an era of an intensified population ageing process, there is a need for creating programs that will support seniors.

12. R. Iwański, *Zrównoważony rozwój obszarów wiejskich a sytuacja osób starszych na wsi*, "Folia Pomoranae Universitatis Technologiae Stetinensis" 2013, "Oeconomica", nr 299(70), p. 83.
13. GUS, *Ludność. Stan i struktura oraz ruch naturalny w przekroju terytorialnym w 2021 r. Stan w dniu 31 grudnia*, Warsaw 2022, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/ludnosc/ludnosc-stand-i-struktura-oraz-ruch-naturalny-w-przekroju-terytorialnym-w-2021-r-stand-w-dniu-31-grudnia,6,31.html#>, access 25.11.2022.
14. K. Gilga, *Rozmiary ryzyk socjalnych w Polsce* [in:] *Zabezpieczanie społeczne a prawa społeczne. Wybrane zagadnienia*, red. O. Kowalczyk, S. Kamiński, Wrocław, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu, 2021, p. 33–34.

Already since the second half of the 20th century, the issue of population ageing has been recognised in both the European and global dimensions. It is worth to note adopting the “International Action Plan on Ageing” in Vienna in 1982 by the First World Assembly on Ageing (it was noted, for example, that development must promote human dignity and ensure equal participation of all age groups in distributing resources, rights, and obligations, intergenerational solidarity should be promoted). In 1991 (Resolution 46/91), the UN General Assembly adopted the “Principles for elder persons”. The document emphasizes values such as independence, participation, care, self-realization, and dignity. During the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in 2002, it was called for eliminating all forms of discrimination, including age discrimination<sup>15</sup>. Responding to the UN’s calls to develop own actions concerning seniors, European countries have constructed a concept of active ageing, which is supposed to translate into supporting older people in their independence, promoting the activity of seniors in the area of professional activity, reducing age discrimination, promoting health programs addressed to older people, providing support to informal carers, expanding community support and, if necessary, providing round-the-clock care<sup>16</sup>. In the Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted in 2007, Article 25, the signatory states declared that they recognize and respect the rights of the elderly to lead a dignified and independent life and to participate in social and cultural life<sup>17</sup>. In the “Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, population ageing is included as one of the key challenges of the European Union. In this document’s network of objectives, one can find postulates to increase the employment rate of people aged 20–64 to 75%, which would have an impact on increasing the number of older people active in the labour market<sup>18</sup>.

## National level – development and creation

National documents characterizing the policy towards seniors and old age, the most important objective of which is to build conditions for satisfying the needs of

15. B. Szatur-Jaworska, *Zasady polityk publicznych w starzejących się społeczeństwach* [in:] *Strategie działania w starzejącym się społeczeństwie Tezy i rekomendacje*, Warsaw 2012, p. 9.

16. G. Mikołajczyk-Lerman, M. Potoczna, *Instytucjonalne wsparcie niesamodzielnych osób starszych w województwie łódzkim, Potencjał, potrzeby, wyzwania*, Łódź – Kraków 2020, p. 42.

17. *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* (2010/C 83/02), Official Journal of the European Union, C 83/389, 30.3.2010, <https://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:pl:PDF>, access 20.09.2022.

18. Commission Communication “*Europe 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*”, [https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/1\\_PL\\_ACT\\_part1\\_v1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/1_PL_ACT_part1_v1.pdf), access 21.09.2022.

the elderly and to shape appropriate relations between generations, in order to aim at maintaining the autonomy of older people for as long as possible and preventing their social exclusion<sup>19</sup>, by their nature at this level are general and directional.

In 2015, the Law on the Elderly was adopted. The purpose of this regulation comes down to defining the area of monitoring and presenting information concerning the situation of older people, and also presents entities participating in implementing this task (mainly public administration bodies and state organizational units). “The sole area of information designated by the legislator includes, for example, the demographic situation, income situation, housing conditions, professional activity, family situation and household structure, the situation of persons with disabilities, social and civic activity, educational and cultural activity. Even though the legislator did not distinguish between rural and urban residents in this regulation, firstly, it defined senior policy as “all the activities of public administration bodies and other organizations and institutions that carry out tasks and initiatives shaping the conditions for dignified and healthy ageing” and specified the age of a senior: a person who reaches the age of 60<sup>20</sup>.

Due to the fact that the number of persons with disabilities increases with age, it is worth looking at the regulations concerning supporting persons with disabilities. Let's point to one of the last regulations that addresses the issue of accessibility for people with special needs. They have been defined as those who, due to their external or internal characteristics or circumstances, must undertake additional measures to be able to participate in various spheres of life on an equal basis with others<sup>21</sup>. This group also includes senior residents of the Polish countryside, if they are affected by disability or other barriers defined in the above legal act.

In 2018, the Council of Ministers formulated and adopted the “Social policy towards the elderly 2030. Security – Participation – Solidarity”, in which it was recognized that the social policy towards the elderly constitutes, for the entire Council of Ministers, one of the priorities of the implemented public policy. In this document, social policy towards the elderly is defined as: “purposeful, long-term, and systemic impact of the state and other public and non-public entities on shaping legal, economic, and social conditions in order to create a favourable life situation for older people, adapted to the social, economic, health care and protection needs changing with age at every stage of the elderly person's life”<sup>22</sup>. The document indicates areas

19. B. Szatur-Jaworska, *Ludzie starzy i starość w polityce społecznej*, Warsaw 2000, p. 121.

20. Ustawa z 11 września 2015 r. o osobach starszych, Dz. U. 2015 poz. 1705.

21. Ustawa z 19 lipca 2019 r. o zapewnianiu dostępności osobom ze szczególnymi potrzebami, Dz. U. 2019 poz. 1696.

22. *Polityka społeczna wobec osób starszych 2030. Bezpieczeństwo – Uczestnictwo – Solidarność, Załącznik do uchwały nr 161 Rady Ministrów z 26 października 2018 r.*, M.P. poz. 1169, p. 4–5.

concerning older people in general, which were treated as challenges for the changing reality:

- forming a positive perception of old age in society;
- participating in social life and supporting all forms of civic, social, cultural, artistic, sporting, and religious activities;
- creating conditions allowing to use the potential of older people as active participants in economic life and the labour market;
- health promotion, disease prevention, access to diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation;
- increasing physical safety – counteracting violence and neglect;
- creating conditions for solidarity and integration between generations;
- activities in favour of education for old age (care and medical staff), up to old age (the entire society), through old age (from the youngest generation), and education in old age (the elderly).

In addition to the above-mentioned activities, those that take into account the independence of the elderly in a special way are also indicated:

- reducing the scale of dependence on others by facilitating access to services that strengthen independence, and adapting the living environment to the functional capabilities of dependent elderly people;
- ensuring optimal access to health, rehabilitation, and nursing services;
- developing a network of environmental and institutional services provided to dependent persons;
- building a support system for informal carers.

The tasks were related to seniors in general, however, assessing the economic and housing situation of the elderly, in the diagnostic part the authors noticed differences in the field of dynamics and structure of income and expenditure depending on the location of the household. It has been assessed that the income situation of households in cities is better than that of households in rural areas. Households in cities had a 30.1% higher income concerning households including exclusively persons at the age of 60 or older, and 32.9% higher for households including exclusively persons under the age of 60, as well as spending (respectively at 23.5% and 31.5%) than rural households. Residents of urban households assessed their material situation better<sup>23</sup>.

In the “National Programme for Counteracting Poverty and Social Exclusion. Updated for 2021–2027, public policy for years up to 2030”, which was adopted in 2021, in addition to the activities that were a development of programs already implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, it was planned to, for

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23. *Ibidem*, p. 73–111.

example, intensify activities for people in need of support in the form of services in a way that allows them to live as long as possible in the family and local environment, securing all necessary needs. It was assumed that these actions would contribute to maintaining independence for a longer time, and in many cases may postpone the need to grant institutional support, e.g. in the form of a stay in a social welfare home. The number of activities include, for example:

- development of respite care for people in need of support in everyday functioning and for actual caregivers;
- actions in the field of developing commissioning NGOs with community support services;
- using modern technologies, such as telecare;
- developing neighbourhood support<sup>24</sup>.

The “Senior+” Multiannual Programme for the years 2021–2025 is a continuation of the “Senior+” Multiannual Programme for the years 2015–2020. Its aim is to increase the activity of older people by co-financing local governments in creating and running “Senior+” Day Care Homes and Senior Clubs. It is worth pointing out that during the last six years – thanks to the program – 361 new Day Care Homes and 922 Senior Clubs have been created<sup>25</sup>.

The “Aktywni+” Multiannual Programme for the years 2021–2025 is a continuation of a programme from previous years and is addressed to NGOs. It assumes increasing the participation of the elderly in all areas of social life by supporting the activity of non-governmental organizations working in favour of seniors, for example, by enriching the offer of free time management for the elderly and increasing the level of self-organization of the seniors’ environment in public life<sup>26</sup>.

Further support for increasing the availability of care services in communes, including specialist care services, for people aged 75+ was designed by implementing the “Opieka 75+” Programme, which is implemented since January 2018 and is addressed to urban, rural, urban-rural communes up to 60,000 residents. The aim of the Program is to improve the accessibility in terms of seniors – over the age of 75 – to care services, including specialist care services for both single people and those who remain in families. Municipalities that join the programme receive financial support up to 50% of the expected costs of the task. The programme’s funds may

24. Uchwała Rady Ministrów nr 105 z 17 sierpnia 2021 r. w sprawie przyjęcia programu pod nazwą “Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Ubóstwu i Wykluczeniu Społecznemu. Aktualizacja 2021–2027 z perspektywą do roku 2030”, M.P. 2021 poz. 843.

25. Uchwała nr 191 Rady Ministrów z 21 grudnia 2020 r. w sprawie ustanowienia Programu Wieloletniego “Senior+” na lata 2021–2025, M.P. 2021 poz. 10.

26. Uchwała nr 167 Rady Ministrów z 16 listopada 2020 r. w sprawie ustanowienia Programu Wieloletniego na rzecz Osób Starszych “Aktywni+” na lata 2021–2025, M.P. 2020 poz. 1125.



be used, for example, to co-finance increasing the number of hours of care services, including specialist care services<sup>27</sup>.

In the field of health protection, actions in favour of seniors have been planned in the “National Health Programme for the years 2021–2025”. The tasks determined for achieving operational objective 5: Demographic challenges included “Supporting social activity of seniors and improving the health-related quality of life of older people”, for which implementation in the form of own task, for example, by the Ministry of Health was assumed, but also entrusted in a competition mode. For example, the following were indicated as important in the tasks:

- the development of services supporting the health and quality of life of older people and their informal carers, in particular through (developing daily forms of psychological support and assistance as well as education);
- actions in favour of coordinating care for the elderly available through health and social assistance;
- education of representatives of medical professions;
- education aimed at preventing health problems<sup>28</sup>.

Unfortunately, the indicated programmes mention persons living in rural areas either marginally or ignore this issue.

### Local government – correct scenarios, but...

The emanation of public policies towards old age consists in the activities of sixteen regional governments, which have been operating since 1999 on the basis of the Act on voivodeship self-government. According to the philosophy of the administrative reform of the country, a voivodeship self-government is not focused on directly satisfying the needs of residents, but on creating programmes that will indirectly affect the persons in a given region. This vision most often takes the form of a social policy strategy, which is a framework document adopted by local governments of given voivodships. One of the operational objectives of the document is most often devoted to the issue of old age.

In the Silesian Voivodeship, the basis for forming the regional social policy is the Social Policy Strategy of the Silesian Voivodeship for 2020–2030 adopted in 2020. In this document, “strategic objective No. 2” has been devoted to developing

27. Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Program “Opieka 75+” na rok 2022*, <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/program-opiek-75-edycja-2022>, access 19.09.2022.

28. Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z 30 marca 2021 r. w sprawie Narodowego Programu Zdrowia na lata 2021–2025, Dz. U. 2021 poz. 642.

conditions in favour of an active and complete participation of older people in society and adapting the support system to the needs of an ageing society, including through such directions of action as:

- developing seniority policies in order to meet the needs of older people and enabling them to use their resources to develop local communities;
- developing community-based care and support networks based on individual resources (family, environment) and institutional resources;
- eliminating barriers concerning the access of seniors to the market of goods and services;
- promoting a positive image of seniors<sup>29</sup>.

The programme treats seniors – in terms of place of residence – as a fairly homogeneous group without noticing any special differences between the residents of the countryside and the city.

Public policy towards rural old age at the local (powiat and municipal) level was outlined in the Act on social assistance. Social assistance is defined in a functional sense as a method, technique, or tool of action to meet specific needs of people of families or entire social groups. Within the meaning of the Act on social assistance, it is defined as an institution of the state's social policy. This document directly implies the obligation to construct a strategy for solving social problems, most often understood as a generalized and durable, although subject to modifications, set of social intervention patterns. Taking into consideration the functional nature of the strategy, it can be concluded that its aim is to achieve a social change in the area of social issues of interest to us, assessing that it is possible to achieve it through processes such as integration and coordination, as well as promoting partnership and dialogue between all stakeholders of social change. Strategies should perform security and protective functions towards marginalized and excluded social groups, while being a stimulator of interinstitutional and intersectoral cooperation, and through their obligatory nature they can be an inspiration for active cooperation between local government and non-governmental organizations<sup>30</sup>. In terms of construction, these documents are similar to national strategies – they include a diagnosis, objective of action, selection of operational directions and objectives, and should include scheduled timetables for implementing activities, as well as proposed measures. It should be noted that the two latter elements constitute the weakest part

29. Strategia Polityki Społecznej Województwa Śląskiego na lata 2020–2030, Załącznik do Uchwały nr VI/25/1/2020 Sejmiku Województwa Śląskiego z 16.11.2020 r.

30. R. Majer, *Polityka samorządowa wobec starości. Strategie i podmioty*, Łódź 2018, p. 31–32.

of planning documents adopted by means of resolutions of district councils and multi-annual communes.

In the analyzed 17 poviats documents from the area of the Silesian Voivodeship (all land poviats were taken into account), the issue of old age in the countryside (but also old age in general) was not distinguished in any particular way. Of course, we can see it in areas related to disability, for example, in the case of the Rybnik poviat under the strategic objective "4: Life independence of residents with disabilities of the Rybnik poviat", which will include issues of support for persons with disabilities starting with increasing the level of social integration, through their employment, up to improving the psychophysical condition and increasing the effectiveness of their institutional support<sup>31</sup>. In the case of the Zawiercie poviat, the issue of population ageing was noticed in the diagnostic part. However, in the programme part, it was treated quite generally in an objective that has been formulated as follows: "High quality of social services, including health, social, specialized, addressed to various groups of recipients with special needs, limitations". Among the specific objectives, the following were indicated:

- extending the service quality standard,
- adapting the forms of assistance to the diagnosed needs,
- improving the access of poviat residents to social assistance resources<sup>32</sup>.

At the commune level, out of 95 rural communes of the Silesian voivodeship, 20 strategic documents were subjected to qualitative analysis. The documents for the study were selected at random and in total they constitute more than 21% of the total strategies adopted by rural governments of the Silesian voivodeship. A reference to the situation of elderly people living in a given commune was found in each of the strategies. The planning part also included projects aimed at improving the quality of life of seniors. When diagnosing senior issues at the level of the local environment, the following issues that affect elderly residents in rural environments were most often noticed:

- lack of a standard of services for the elderly;
- lack of small forms of social assistance and support for families caring for the elderly;
- increased demand for infrastructural forms of assistance (social assistance homes), usually greater than the municipality's financial capabilities;

31. Uchwała Nr XLII/258/14 Rady Powiatu w Rybniku z dnia 26 czerwca 2014 r. w sprawie przyjęcia Powiatowej Strategii Rozwiązywania Problemów Społecznych w Powiecie Rybnickim na lata 2014–2023, <https://bip.starostwo.rybnik.pl/start/12-akty-prawne?start=296>, access 16.09.2022.

32. Uchwała Rady Powiatu Zawierciańskiego z 16 marca 2021 r. w sprawie przyjęcia Strategii Integracji i Rozwiązywania Problemów Społecznych Powiatu Zawierciańskiego na lata 2021–2026, <https://zawiercie.poviat.pl/dokumenty-strategiczne.html>, access 16.08.2022.

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- increase in the share of people of post-working age in the total population;
- technical deficits (in terms of the availability of equipment facilitating daily functioning – barriers in terms of persons with disabilities, bathroom equipment);
- lack of volunteers and NGOs providing support for the elderly;
- increase in the number of single persons;
- communication difficulties and difficulties in accessing health care and rehabilitation.

In the case of the Poczesna commune (Częstochowa powiat), the “Activation of groups at risk of exclusion” strategic objective included an operational goal entitled: “Improvement of persons with disabilities and seniors” in terms of which the following were planned:

- developing care services as well as specialized care services and respite care,
- cooperating with other local government units and NGOs in favour of persons with disabilities and the elderly,
- supporting various forms of cultural and recreational events in which persons with disabilities can participate,
- undertaking actions to create a Care and Residential Centre,
- developing transport services for persons with disabilities<sup>33</sup>.

In the case of Kozięłowy (Myszków powiat), “building an integrated support system for seniors and persons with disabilities” was designed by:

- developing care services and specialized care services,
- activating the family and the neighbourhood environment in order to meet the vital needs of the elderly and dependent people,
- undertaking actions to create a Municipal Council of Seniors,
- organizing volunteering,
- undertaking steps to create an environmental facility for seniors.

The networks of strategic objectives, planned in other documents, have a similar arrangement, and differ in a manner limited by the implementation capabilities of individual local environments. It should be noted that they are generally consistent with both key findings of gerontology and programme acts adopted at European and national levels. It is also worth noting the interest of municipal self-governors in developing services for the elderly, which is in line with the currently implemented deinstitutionalisation process and the development of social services.

33. Uchwała Nr 251/XXXIII/21 Rady Gminy Poczesna z 21 grudnia 2021 r. w sprawie przyjęcia „mieszkańcy polskiej wsi, o ile dotyczą ich”, <https://bip.poczesna.pl/pliki/dokumenty/2021-12-29/290/249.pdf>, access 17.08.2022.

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## Summary and recommendations towards developing services in the Polish countryside

The multilevel character of public policies towards old age may offer real opportunities to improve the quality of life of older people, provided that the tasks indicated in individual programming documents are implemented and subject to the evaluation process. Documents adopted at international and European level by nature remain at a certain level of generality. However, they set out certain directions of action that should be implemented in national documents. National programmes constitute an area of implementation capabilities and are addressed to public institutions, non-governmental entities, as well as the economic sector. They are consistent with the findings of gerontologists and social politicians in the field of senior needs. However, already at this point, it would be useful to increase the diversity of the recipient. Old age in the city, where there is access to a wider social and health infrastructure, still seems easier to overcome than old age in the countryside. Despite the changes taking place in the country, the countryside lacks an extensive social and health infrastructure that would improve the quality of life of older people.

General documents, in which we do not specifically differentiate the recipients and treat the resident of a rural area or a city in the same way, are definitely easier to prepare and implement later. However, is that what public policies and social policy in particular, are about? Regional – voivodeship documents treat seniors as a fairly uniform group, regardless of the place of residence and the possible resulting limitations. Poviats governments focused only on persons with disabilities, including seniors. While, the authors' intentions lack particular concern for the residents of the countryside. "Old age in the countryside" can be found only at the level of municipal documents. The strategies include concern for developing care services, activating and broadly understood integration of older people with other social groups. However, the remaining problem concerns the lack of a requirement to systematically monitor and evaluate strategic documents, which may lead to a very different approach to implementing individual records.

To sum up: the area of public policies includes a number of programme documents concerning old age, in which there is no special distinction between the residents of rural and urban areas, therefore the author recommends the following solutions:

- the minister responsible for social policy, in cooperation with the minister responsible for agriculture, to develop a comprehensive programme on improving the quality of life of elderly people in rural areas, including an in-depth diagnosis of the situation of seniors and proposals for this social group;

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- including the specificity of old age in the countryside in public policy documents concerning the development of social services and health care;
- preferences for NGOs implementing projects for seniors living in rural areas, for example, in terms of the “Aktywni+” programme;
- creating programmes including communication facilities for seniors and a renovation fund that will allow people in the most difficult housing situation to improve their living conditions;
- introducing a requirement to monitor local strategies for solving social problems so that the provisions are reviewed at least every two years.

The progressive programming of the deinstitutionalisation process in the area of public policies may contribute to developing social services in favour of a higher quality of life of seniors, it is important that it is made in a manner that takes into account the specificity of old age in the countryside, which is still distant from the social and health infrastructure of Polish cities.

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