

Project: Strengthening the Resilience of Public Administrations after Covid-19 with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)”

Case study: Lubuskie Voivodship Office (LUW), Poland, Andżelika Mirska

1. Background of Lubuskie Voivodship Office (LUW) and CAF experience

Poland is a unitary state, with a three-tier administrative division. The territory of Poland is divided into 16 voivodships (provinces), these are further divided into 314 powiats (counties), and these in turn are divided into 2477 gminas (communes). **At the voivodship level, the public authority is shared between a voivodship's self-government¹ and a central government-appointed governor called a voivode with the government's territorial administration.** The voivode performs his tasks with the help of the vice-voivode and through the voivodship office. The **Lubuskie Voivodship Office** in Gorzów Wielkopolski (Lubuski Urząd Wojewódzki “**LUW**”) is part of the government administration in the Lubuskie Voivodship, which is one of the smallest voivodships in Poland with 1 million inhabitants.

Fig.1. Division of Poland into 16 voivodships and location of the Lubuskie Voivodship



Source: Chancellery of the Prime Minister, <https://www.gov.pl/web/dvbt2/lubuskie-pierwsze-z-dvb-t2-hevc>

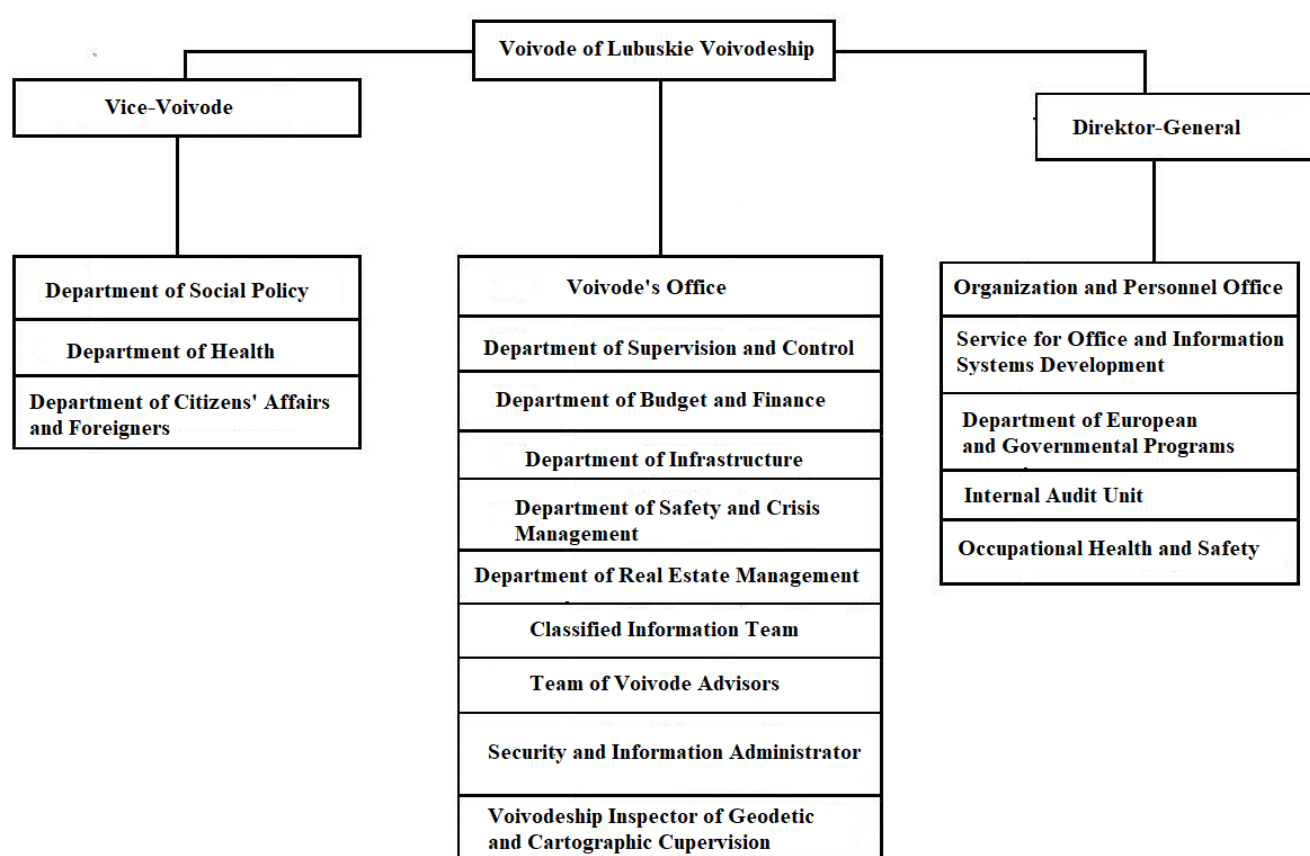
The **LUW** is headed by a **Voivode of the Lubuskie Voivodship** (*Wojewoda Lubuski*) who reports directly to the Prime Minister and by whom is appointed and dismissed. The voivode is a political position, i.e. in the event of the Council of Ministers’ resignation, the voivode also resigns.

¹ The voivodship self-government bodies are the voivodship council and the voivodship board. The voivodship council has legislative powers and is elected by the inhabitants of the voivodship. The voivodship board is elected by the voivodship council.

The tasks performed by each voivode in Poland are very extensive and include the field of public safety, crisis management, health protection, education, environmental protection, social policy, geodesy and cartography, and many others.

The implementation of these tasks is reflected in the **L UW** structure, which is divided into offices and departments. These, in turn, are divided into many smaller organisational units, e.g. sub-departments or sections.

Fig.2. Organisational Chart of the Lubuskie Voivodship Office



Source: Organisational Regulations of the Lubuskie Voivodship Office of May 11, 2016

https://bip.lubuskie.uw.gov.pl/struktura/schemat_organizacyjny

The LUW supports two types of customers:

- 1) Citizens: services provided to citizens include issuing foreigners permits to stay and work in Poland and issuing passports to Polish citizens. The amount of public tasks regarding providing direct services to citizens is not large, since the basic public utility services for the citizen are provided in Poland by the local self-government.

- 2) Institutions, i.e. other public administration units: including both government administration units (e.g. Voivodship Police Headquarters, Voivodship Headquarters of the State Fire Service, and many others) and local self-government units.

Within the **Lubuskie Voivodship** region, there are 3-levels of local self-government²:

- one unit of the voivodship's self-government – the Self-Government of the Lubuskie Voivodship.
- 13 counties (powiats) and 2 cities with powiats rights.
- 82 communes: 9 urban communes (including 2 cities with powiat rights), 34 urban-rural communes, and 39 rural communes.

The relationships that occur between the **LUW** and these local administrative units have a different legal nature: management, supervision, control, collaboration, and cooperation. The duties of each voivode and each voivodship office in Poland³ include managing and supervising the government administration in their voivodship and counties located within its borders, e.g. the police, fire service, environmental protection inspections. The centralized structures dominate here. These tasks are financed from a separate part of the Polish state budget, which is administered by the voivode.

According to the article 172 of the Constitution of Poland of 1997 the voivode is also the supervisor of regional and local self-government units but concerning legality only. It makes no difference whether they are the regional or local self-government's tasks and services financed from their budgets or tasks and services commissioned by the government administration, i.e. financed from the state budget.

Issuing binding orders by the voivode to local self-government units is possible only while declaring an emergency when the security of the state and citizens is at risk. This is possible under the following laws about extraordinary situations: Act on the state of a natural disaster of 18th April 2002, Act on the state of emergency of 21st June 2002, Act on the state of martial law and on competences of the Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of 29th August 2002, Act on crisis management of 26th April 2007.

² In Poland, there is a three-tier structure of local government. In Polish, the term "**territorial** self-government" is used. The Polish Constitution states that there are a **regional** self-government and a **local** self-government. Since 1999, the voivodship self-government has the status of a regional self-government, county self-government and communal self-government are the two levels of **local** self-government.

³ Act on Voivode and Governmental Administration in Voivodship of 23th January 2009.

Cooperation between the voivode and the local self-government may take the form of voluntary formal agreements. For example, the **LUW** concluded a special agreement with the Krosno Odrzańskie commune regarding the rent of an apartment by the commune for the repatriated family. For this purpose, the voivode provided the commune with funds. Another example of an agreement concluded in 2021 between the **LUW** and the local government is the one on the financing of war cemeteries.

Informal contacts are certainly possible. **LUW** is open to communication and dialogue with local self-governments. **LUW** often offers help, for example, it has conducted appropriate training for local governments on the practical use of computer programs to improve control and supervision processes. Local governments could benefit from this training without any obligation.

LUW is managed by the **Director-General**⁴ whereas departments are managed by **directors**, and sub-departments by **managers**.

An important amendment⁵ has taken place since 2021: a medical dispatching room has been incorporated into the **LUW**, with employees on duty 24 hours a day. Their main task is to dispose and distribute emergency medical teams. The Department of Safety and Crisis Management also works around the clock.

In 2012, 453 people were employed in the **LUW**. In 2022, the number of **LUW** employees totals 541 including 402 women (75.31%). This increase in employees number results mainly from taking over the tasks related to the child benefit, the so-called 500+⁶, and the implementation of medical dispatchers to the **LUW**. The growing number of foreigners applying for a residence and work permit in Poland has also had a significant impact on the number of employees in the **LUW**.

⁴ The Director-General is a higher grade in the civil service created in some government administration offices in Poland, prescribed by the Act of 21st November 2008 on the civil service.

⁵ Under the amendment of 10th May, 2018, to the Act of 8th September 2006 on the State Medical Rescue in Poland, medical dispatching rooms were incorporated into the structures of 16 voivodship offices since 01/01/2021, including the **LUW** structure.

⁶ The central government program "Family 500+" means a benefit of PLN 500 (tax free) per month for every child under 18 years old, regardless of family income.

LUW deals with these applications for the family benefit submitted by parents who are outside Poland. Previously, this task was performed by the voivodship's self-government of the Lubuskie Voivodship. At the time the task was taken over by the **LUW**, there were 8,000 outstanding requests to be considered and there were also applications to be considered on an ongoing basis. Currently, it is about 3,500 applications per year - hence the need to increase employment.

The **LUW** has an annual budget of PLN 54,919 at its disposal for day-to-day maintenance (EUR 11,835). This budget covers salaries and all expenses related to the functioning of the office, such as bills for electricity, water, repairs, purchase of office equipment, business trips, and employment of a sign interpreter.

PLN 1,549,852 is allocated for the performance of public tasks by the **LUW** (EUR 333,993). These are funds transferred by the **LUW** to the government administration in the voivodship, e.g. the State Fire Service and to local self-government units in the voivodship for the performance of commissioned tasks.

CAF has been used continuously in the **LUW** since 2009 as a crucial tool for improving the quality of management. In 2009, the CAF Coordinator and CAF self-assessment group were appointed for the first time⁷, for the second time in 2013⁸, for the third time in 2016⁹, and for the fourth time in 2019¹⁰. The CAF self-assessment was carried out in 2009, 2011, 2013, 2016, and 2019. The composition of the members may vary in each CAF self-assessment period and other employees may be appointed to the CAF team. The establishment of the next CAF team and the next CAF self-assessment are scheduled for the second half of 2022. The level of self-assessment in the **LUW** increases with each subsequent exercise.

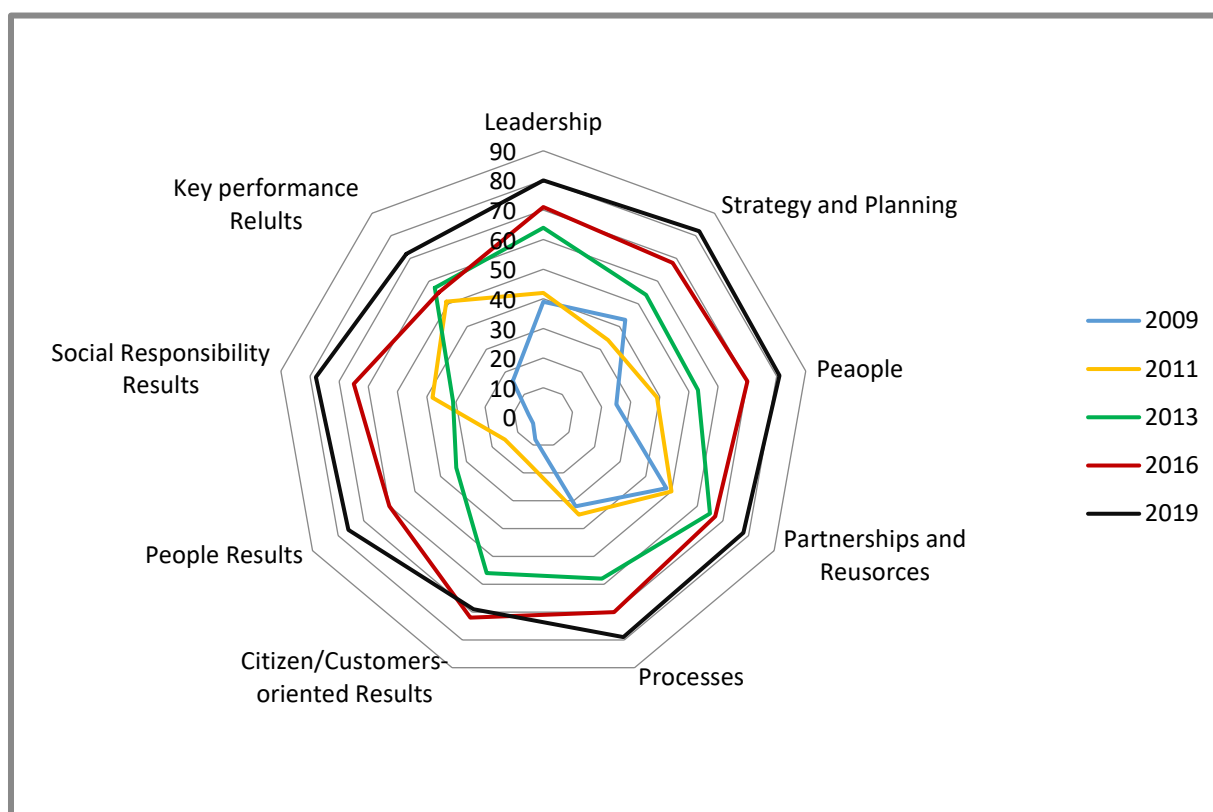
⁷ Ordinance No. 7 of the **LUW** Director-General of February 27, 2009, on the appointment of the CAF Coordinator.

⁸ Ordinance No. 55 of the **LUW** Director-General of 12 November 2013 on the appointment of the CAF Coordinator and CAF self-assessment groups
<https://bip.lubuskie.uw.gov.pl/generalny/zarządzenia/116>

⁹ Ordinance No. 41 of the **LUW** Director-General of 13 September 2016 on the appointment of the CAF Coordinator and CAF self-assessment groups
<https://bip.lubuskie.uw.gov.pl/generalny/zarządzenia/270>

¹⁰ Ordinance No. 10 of the **LUW** Director-General of 19 March 2019 on the appointment of the CAF Coordinator and CAF self-assessment groups
<https://bip.lubuskie.uw.gov.pl/generalny/zarządzenia/367>

Fig.3. The radar graph of the degree of fulfilment of criteria of the model CAF 2009-2019



Criterion					
	2009	2011	2013	2016	2019
Leadership	39	42	64	71	80
Strategy and Planning	43	34	54	68	82
People	25	39	53	70	81
Partnerships and Resources	48	50	65	67	78
Processes	32	35	58	70	79
Citizen/Customers-oriented Results	8	16	56	72	69
People Results	4	15	34	60	76
Social Responsibility Results	5	38	31	65	78
Key performance Results	16	51	57	55	72
Total	220	320	472	598	695

Source: CAF Results Report 2019 provided by the CAF Coordinator of the **LUW**

The **LUW** Director-General appoints the CAF Coordinator and three CAF self-assessment groups comprised of 10 members each: a group of directors, a group of managers, and a group of employees.

According to one of the interviewees:

*“Each CAF self-assessment shows the direction we should follow in order to constantly raise the quality level of the **LUW** as an organization that performs public tasks, but also as employers.”*

With each CAF exercise, a report is prepared along with a **CAF Improvement Plan**.

Additionally, every year, an **Annual LUW Action Plan** is prepared with the participation of employees, which takes into account the **CAF Improvement Plan**. The **Annual Action Plans** are approved by the voivode and available to the public¹¹.

The **LUW** has already developed five CAF Improvement Plans.

The box below includes the improvement objectives of the last two CAF Improvement Plans

CAF Improvement Plan 2016	CAF Improvement Plan 2019
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reconstruction and modernization of the Intr@net LUW internal website 2. Development of a strategic document entitled "Internal Communication Policy" 3. "Idea Box" implementation 4. A review and optimization of HR procedures functioning in the LUW 5. Changes in the rules for the implementation of procedures regarding warehouse orders 6. Improving the process management system as a modern organizational method 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing employee participation in the organization management 2. Building the positive LUW image through pro-social Task Teams 3. Verification and update of the LUW Strategy 4. Implementation of the Internal Communication Policy 5. IT System Development Policy 6. Property Management Policy

For example, the CAF 2019 Improvement Plan includes goal no. 4 "Implementation of *the Internal Communication Policy*". It was the consecutive stage of the improvement process as the CAF 2016 Improvement Plan included goal no. 2. "Development of a strategic document entitled "*Internal Communication Policy*". To achieve this goal, a Task Team was established, which prepared such a document. For the organisation, there was also important the goal no. 1 "Reconstruction and modernisation of the Intr@net **LUW**" 2016, which was related to the goal no. 4, 2019.

¹¹ **LUW** Annual Action Plans are available to citizens on the **LUW** website:

<https://bip.lubuskie.uw.gov.pl/struktura/program_dzialania>

In each Annual Action Plan of **LUW**, it was stated initially that "the activities will contribute to the achievement of one of the most important goals, which is the constant improvement of customer service quality and improvement of work in the **LUW**."

In CAF 2019, it clearly indicates that the management and employees of **LUW** can notice potential not only in improving procedures and tools but also in increasing employee participation in **LUW** management. Successive improvement plans confirmed that the great potential lies in employees who receive more independence and responsibility.

In the CAF Self-Assessment conducted in 2019, the participants indicated the need to update and popularize the **LUW Strategy** among employees and citizens. Therefore, one of the six tasks in the 2019 CAF Improvement Plan was "Verification and update of the **LUW Strategy**". The aim was included in the "Annual Action Plan of **LUW 2020**" and a **Task Team** was appointed to implement this task. After consultations with **LUW** employees (participatory procedures), an innovative and meaningful **LUW Strategy** was developed, which was then approved by the **LUW** management and published on the **LUW** website in 2021.

Currently, employees have indicated that this was a very important step in improving the work of the **LUW**. Employees identify with *the LUW Strategy* and appreciate its value and importance. It is essential for them that the document was created in a participatory process instead of imposing it from above. The initiative and substantive employees' involvement in the formulation of the **LUW Strategy** is appreciated by the management.

In order to implement the **CAF Improvement Plans**, specific "Task Teams" are established among others on the initiative of employees. Task Teams are composed of **LUW** employees from various organisational units. The initiative to establish a Task Team is always bottom-up, and employee participation is voluntary which is a commitment beyond employee duties. Task Teams are appointed by the **LUW** General Director.

*"The Task Teams are entirely "under employee rule" as the heads are not the members and they have no impact on our activities, The Task Teams are established to improve the efficiency of **LUW** work. What is more, the Task Teams enable horizontal communication between employees of different units and exchange of experience. We have been provided the management support that is open to our new ideas."*

Examples of other Task Teams :

- 1) The Task Team established in 2019: *Development of the Age Management Policy in the **LUW***, 8 employees;
- 2) The Task Team established in 2019: *Humanly-oriented administration that is a socially sensitive clerk*, 19 employees;

In employees' opinions, the use of CAF has empowered the staff considerably: employees are very eager to comment on **LUW** operations, propose changes, indicate what should be improved, *"we no longer have concerns about speaking up"*. The CAF exercise helps to promote a sense of ownership for the performance of the organisation. It also helps to provide a vehicle for voicing opinions upward to the management. Indeed, in the employee satisfaction survey conducted in **LUW** in 2021, when asked "Do you have the opportunity to present your idea to your supervisor? 91.6% of employees answered "yes"

*"The communication system is created in such a way to enable employees to speak freely. All the problems are not perceived in advance and the changes suggested by the employees are useful for the **LUW** improvement. And here the CAF plays a key role."*

2. Impact of the COVID crisis and the role of CAF

2.1. Impact of the COVID crisis in Poland

The first case of Covid-19 in Poland was confirmed on March 4, 2020. There was a state of epidemic emergency in Poland from 14th to the 20th March 2020, while the state of the epidemic continued from 20th March 2020 to the 16th May 2022. Both of these states were introduced in Poland by the ordinances of the Minister of Health. The Minister acted on the basis of authorisation under the Act of 5 December 2008 *on preventing and combating infections and infectious diseases in humans*.

The framework for the functioning of public administration has been set out in the Act of 2nd March, 2020, *on special solutions related to the prevention, counteracting, and combating of COVID-19, other infectious diseases, and the crisis situations caused by them*. On this basis, it was possible, for example, to switch to "home office" and to apply simplified public procurement procedures. The act also allowed the Prime Minister, at the request of the Minister of Health, to impose new tasks on local self-government units concerning counteracting COVID-19. **The act also authorized voivodes to issue binding instructions to local self-government units.**

Responsibility for combating COVID-19 in Poland bears the Council of Ministers, especially the Prime Minister with the Minister of Health and voivodes and voivodships offices as the representative of the central government in voivodships.

The “crisis management system” was used to direct and coordinate activities regarding COVID-19 in Poland, which has had a centralized four-level structure according to the Act on Crisis Management of 26th April 2007: starting with the state/central government level, through the voivodship, county, and commune. Each level of public authority has its crisis management plan, which must be in line with a higher-level crisis management plan.

At the **central level**, the main role is played by the Government Centre for Security and the Government Crisis Management Team, led by the Prime Minister. It is composed of ministers, including the Minister of Health, Minister of Interior and Administration, and Minister of National Defence.

Such a crisis management structure is mapped to the lower levels of public administration. In each of the 16 voivodships, the main role is played by: **Voivode, Voivodship Crisis Management Team, and Voivodship Crisis Management Centre. In the Lubuskie Voivodship, the Centre is located within the structure of the LUW.** At the level of counties and communes, responsibility is assumed by local self-government authorities.

A new committee was also created: the Medical Council as an advisory body to the Prime Minister. The Medical Council was established in November 2020 by the Prime Minister. Primarily, its tasks included analysing and assessing the current pandemic situation, developing proposals for action, and issuing opinions on legal acts - such as regulations that introduced new epidemic rules and restrictions in Poland. It was composed of 17 independent experts. They were doctors holding the title of professors from a medical higher education institution from Poland. In January 2022, 13 members resigned. The reason was that the Council of Ministers did not always respect the recommendations of the Medical Council. For example, the Medical Council recommended compulsory vaccinations against COVID-19 for several professional groups, and the central government did not agree to it. The government explained that in addition to medical indications, other factors must be taken into account, including social and economic ones. Subsequently, the Prime Minister appointed a new COVID-19 Council, which consists of 29 people. Apart from doctors, it includes representatives of socio-economic sciences and administrative bodies, e.g. Main Pharmaceutical Inspector, and Chief Sanitary Inspector.

2.2. Challenges of the COVID crisis for LUW

The organization provided that the greatest challenge for the leadership in the first period of the pandemic COVID-19 was the unpredictability of the situation development and time pressure in decision-making. Besides, there was a need to take over new tasks regarding direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic i.a. organizing the evacuation of Nursing Home Care in case of a COVID-19 infection and organizing a place for quarantine for people from abroad. The employees of medical dispatchers and the Department of Safety and Crisis Management had a particularly higher workload.

Each voivodship office in Poland, and thus also the **LUW**, has extensive crisis management plans that comply with the National Crisis Management Plan for the whole of Poland. In turn, the crisis management plans prepared by the county self-government and the commune self-government must be consistent with the voivodship crisis management plans. The cycle of crisis planning cannot be longer than two years, but the plans are regularly updated if necessary. This crisis management system enables efficient vertical communication between the Polish government, voivodship offices, county self-government, and communal self-government.

The only challenge during the pandemic was the fact that this communication within the crisis management system was much more intense. There was a need for more frequent contact between the central government and **LUW**. There was a need for more intense contact to coordinate activities with subordinate administrative units (e.g. the State Fire Service) to exchange information and resources. There was the need to deal rapidly and to maintain direct communication and modern communication channels. Also, more frequent was the coordination of activities with local self-government units, a supporting and enabling role. Telephone communication was used and teleconferences were organized.

Therefore, the additional challenge was involved with it considering being a good example and a leader for other organizations. They expected help, inspiration, and indicating solutions to the problem. This was because the **LUW** has direct contact with the central government.¹²

¹² Article 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997 states that the voivode is a representative of the Council of Ministers in the voivodship.

Another challenge was the transition to work in the “home office”. It was necessary to develop a document specifying the determination of working conditions and developing a system of delegating employees to other (extra) tasks, e.g. operating a helpline for citizens.

Monitoring the home office, i.e. developing new procedures for assessing efficiency and effectiveness was also a challenge. Resources for work at home such as security systems, logging into the office's network from home, and redirecting phone calls to private phones (with double authentication) **were not a problem** because the **LUW** had already been prepared for this. Working from home was possible because, before the pandemic, the "Electronic Document Workflow" (or “Electronic Document Transmission”) system was implemented in the **LUW**. The result was trouble-free work from home for employees. During the pandemic, approximately 62% of employees worked from home. Employees of medical dispatchers and the Department of Safety and Crisis Management could not work from home, they had to work from the office.

In the **LUW**, there was no need to revise the annual action plans.

“LUW is unique on the regional scale, we haven’t slowed down the work pace, the intensity of accepting applicants was lower (because of pandemic restrictions) but decisions were issued on time as well as all projects were implemented on time. We dealt very well with the organization of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic because we already had experience with previous crises, from which we drew conclusions.”

A very important challenge was maintaining the possibility for citizens to contact the office, e.g. to obtain information, submit applications and requests in the event of closure of the office to citizens, or restriction of access to the office. It was necessary to organize services for citizens, especially for those digitally excluded without access to the Internet, and flexible response to customer needs.

The next challenge for the **LUW** was to shape the recruitment processes of new employees in pandemic conditions and implementation processes for newly recruited employees.

Another challenge regarded maintaining the current employees’ involvement in soft, health-promoting, and participatory projects as well as maintaining CAF communication. It was crucial to monitor the physical and mental well-being of employees, self-organisation of employees, and responsibility for the team.

Certainly, a major problem and a new situation for employees was a lack of interpersonal contacts, a situation of uncertainty, threats, and the official's sense of responsibility for the public good. Moreover, it was essential to maintain the training for employees at a similar level.

Experiences with prior crises e.g. Bird flu, African swine fever virus ASF were dynamic and unpredictable. For example, disposing a large amount of animals and accessing rendering plants, which are private companies. It was necessary to make quick and unconventional decisions. There were legal constraints, and rigid public procurement requirements (long legal procedures). Rapid decision-making was essential. As a result, better and faster procedures for financing activities related to responding to new crisis challenges have been developed in cooperation with higher levels of government¹³. Rapid decision-making processes and intervention budget expenditures were created. These crisis experiences forced changes in procedures that greatly helped in responding to the Covid-19 crisis, e.g., when purchasing disinfectants.

2.3. Role of CAF in preparing for the crisis

The CAF exercises have been carried out every two and then every three years since 2009 serving to strengthen preparedness.

The organisation indicated that the application of the CAF contributed to the development of a "participatory management style" that serves the **LUW** best in a crisis. The CAF Improvement Plan 2019 includes the aim of "Increasing employee participation in the organization management". CAF research has indicated that the formation of self-managing project groups (task teams) contributes to the improvement of the organization. Working in task teams allowed for the retaining ties between employees, better communication, and strengthened the sense of employees' public mission. Employees indicated that thanks to the CAF, a greater influence was possible on how the organisation operates, and thus being prepared for the situation of the COVID-19 crisis was acceptable. Employees who had a sense of influence on the organisation showed greater initiative in solving new problems.

¹³ The central government and parliament were informed by the **LUW** about the need to improve the public procurement procedure and as result an amendment to the Act on Public Procurement was adopted.

They engaged in new duties and had a sense of responsibility for the organisation as a whole.

In addition, the aim of the "IT System Development Policy" was implemented in the CAF Improvement Plan 2019. The COVID-19 crisis has proved how crucial it is to prepare a well-functioning ICT system and train employees in this regard. According to the organization's assessment, this CAF objective was crucial in building the organization's resilience and in handling the COVID-19 crisis.

Having a professional who is willing to learn is an essential element in preparing an organisation for a crisis. If an employee feels appreciated by the organisation because it invests in the development of knowledge, competencies, and skills, the willingness to get involved in solving crises increases. Employees emphasized that it is important to them that all departments receive the same amount of money for training and that it is not distributed unfairly. In this way, positive relations can be built between an employee and employer as well as mutual trust. Already in the CAF Improvement Plan 2009, it was stated that the area of improvement must be "Development of employee qualifications". Each subsequent CAF self-assessment claimed that employees appreciate the fact that they are employees of **LUW**. During the crisis, when the procedures were too rigid and not adapted to new challenges, a well-prepared employee with specific expertise was an asset.

According to the organization, thanks to CAF's open culture and readiness for innovation were higher and helped handle the crisis of COVID-19.

The self-assessment group in the **LUW** is divided into three groups comprised of 10 members each: a group of directors, a group of managers, and a group of employees. This implies that 30 employees from all hierarchy levels in **LUW** are involved in the CAF procedure. This solution provides vertical communication, i.e. between management levels. Cross-departmental communication is guaranteed as there are people from different departments of the **LUW** in each group.

The CAF coordinator is an employee of the Organisation and Personnel Office in **LUW**. The CAF Coordinator is employed in the position of Quality Management and Customer Service Improvement and is responsible for planning the CAF self-assessment process, including the communication process, disseminating information about the self-assessment processes and

organizing training for self-assessment groups. The CAF Coordinator reports directly to the Director-General of the CAF, which was very crucial during the pandemic, as the swift dissemination of information and direct contact were important in response to the crisis. As emphasized, mutual respect, trust, and understanding between the Director-General and the CAF Coordinator are essential.

Simultaneously, the CAF Coordinator is also responsible for editing messages and information for employees in `Intr@net`. During the COVID-19 pandemic, `Intr@net` became the main source of information for all **LUW** employees regarding important issues.

3. Innovative practices as a response to the crisis

3.1 Supporting the well-being of the employees

The **LUW** indicated that maintaining the quality and timeliness of tasks at the same possible standards as before the pandemic was the most important challenge during the pandemic. Primarily, providing a citizen with high-quality administrative services was the priority during the closure of the **LUW**. Simultaneously, **LUW** was aware that employees and their physical and mental health are also very crucial.

Therefore, ensuring the best possible working conditions for employees was a problem. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a feeling of danger and uncertainty. There was fear not only among citizens but also among administration employees.

To achieve this purpose, it was necessary to differentiate solutions regarding two groups of **LUW** employees.

The first group included employees who could not be assigned to work from home, comprising principally employees of medical dispatching and the Department of Safety and Crisis Management. They were obliged to work in the office. The second group of employees, which accounted for approximately 62%, was assigned to work in the home office. There was no possibility for personal contact with colleagues and management. There was a concern that working from home and the lack of social contact would be difficult for them both physically and mentally.

Counteracting this effect, the management and the employees wanted to introduce certain solutions for the physical and mental well-being of employees.

Some ideas developed by the "Task Team" were implemented, for example, *the Development of the Age Management Policy in the LUW*.

Before the pandemic, at the initiative of **LUW** employees, physical exercises were conducted named "healthy spine" for the **LUW** employees. In a pandemic, the use of the training room in **LUW** was not possible. Therefore, an innovative solution was introduced, i.e. "healthy spine" classes were held online. It was not only an opportunity to take up physical activity during the lockdown but also in this way relations and a sense of community among employees was built. There were also initiatives to meet employees in the fresh air, joint physical exercises and Nordic walking. This offer was directed to all employees. Previously, employees did not meet outside of work to play sports together. Mutual support and joint activity apart from employee duties allowed them to function well during the crisis. During the pandemic, employees also transferred their pro-social activities to the Internet, continuing to work together as "Task teams" on the preparation of the social action on behalf of **LUW**. Thus, it was possible to maintain a mental balance and a sense of fulfilling the public mission during the crisis.

To support the employees' mental health, **LUW** also introduced an online training offer on health, e.g. coping with stress during a crisis.

After assigning employees to work in the home office, the problem arose from maintaining communication between employees and management, as well as maintaining the relationship between employees and the office and a sense of belonging to the organisation. It was important for officials to have access to information, as an official working from home cannot consult directly with someone or simply talk to a colleague from the office. The internal Internet called intr@net was the solution to this problem. Intr@net operated in **LUW** before the pandemic, but its potential was noticed by employees during the pandemic and became the main channel of internal communication during the pandemic and is maintained also now, in the post-pandemic time.

Another problem in this area concerned ensuring epidemic safety and minimizing the risk of COVID-19 infection for employees who worked in **LUW** and not in the home office.

It is crucial for the employees to feel that their health and work comfort is important to the management. First of all, **LUW** purchased an ionisation device for documents.

"In addition to health-oriented activities as part of "Age Management", at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we bought a device for disinfecting (ozonizing) documents submitted to the office. We use it the whole time. We have developed procedures in this regard to be no delays at work."

To reduce the number of employees entering the office at the same time and thus minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection, flexible starting hours were introduced. The employee could start work between 6.30 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. Since the working time is 8 hours, the end of work was between 3.30 p.m. and 5.30 p.m.

In the employee satisfaction survey 2021, one question was: "Does **LUW** provide adequate work comfort for you to work effectively?¹⁴."

	2016	2021
Yes	36.82%	65.8%
No	14.93%	3.9%
Not always	45.27%	30.3%

These innovations proved successful and gave employees a sense of security which is crucial in a crisis.

3.2. The use of e-learning methods to upskill critical competencies in a crisis

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, **LUW** had an extensive training system for its employees. They were held either in **LUW** or officials travelled to other cities where training centres were located. Each employee had the right to choose the training. The employee could also report the need to organize some new training on a topic related to his scope of work in the office. The training concerned both legal procedures related to the performance of public tasks and new IT programs implemented at the office. Employees were very willing to benefit from the training and appreciated the possibility of professional development through access to various training courses. There was a professional development culture in the office supported by the management. The budget for the training was large, each of the **LUW** departments had funds to finance the training of their employees.

In the initial term of the pandemic, training was suspended during the periods when the office was closed and employees were sent to work from home. However, the employees

¹⁴ Extensive employee (internal customer) satisfaction surveys were conducted in the **LUW**: 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2021.

needed substantive training on the tasks performed. It was also essential for management that employees could continue to receive training and education. It was understandable to the management that despite the pandemic, tasks must be performed in the best possible way. The problem concerned cutting the officials off from the current rhythm of work. The lack of training deepened the feeling of a crisis. Therefore, it was important to counteract locking officials at home. Thus, by participating in the training, employees could feel "normal".

During the COVID-19 pandemic, management decided to move to an online training system. It was important for **LUW** that the online training was flexible regarding dates and times as well as a wide and interesting offer of training was provided, both in the field of substantive and soft skills. Due to the pandemic situation, private training companies, which could not conduct training in person, prepared an extensive and professional training offer for public offices.

Employees of the **LUW** were very willing to benefit from such training during the pandemic. Employees highly appreciate the online training.

Currently, **LUW** declares that it will keep a high number of online training offers also after the pandemic when officials returned to work in the office.

COVID-19 contributed to the implementation of online training. It turned out that an extensive training offer is available and online training prepared by external trainers is at a high level. The training is less expensive, especially when purchased as a package.

Currently, the innovation is that the **LUW** Director-General agreed that if the online training lasts all day, the employee can attend it from home. It is used when 2 - 3 people work in the office in one room and the person participating in the online training may be distracted by other employees or visitors.

This solution will also apply to employees who will be assigned to work in the home office. Therefore, they will be able to benefit from online training.

3.3 New technologies in communication with external partners

The voivode and **LUW** are the authority for managing or supervising or controlling many entities and units, mainly the State Fire Service and local self-government units. Before the

COVID-19 pandemic, paper document circulations were used or personal contacts were organized, i.e. bilateral meetings or meetings with many entities at the **LUW** headquarters.

The situation of the COVID-19 pandemic limited personal contacts, and when the **LUW** was closed to outside visitors, it became impossible to organize meetings with external entities in the **LUW** headquarters.

Paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the necessity to organize meetings and consultations with external partners more often because in a crisis it was necessary to make good decisions quickly, and thus, it is necessary to obtain information from other entities. Decisions also needed to be communicated quickly to other entities. Cooperation between various entities and actors as well as the exchange of experiences and looking for common solutions in the situation of uncertainty and unpredictability was also vital.

On this account, it was decided to implement the organisation of hybrid conferences. **LUW** has at its disposal modern conference rooms that allow organising conferences with many entities and units simultaneously. The Voivode, General Director of **LUW**, employees of the Department of Safety and Crisis Management, or other employees of **LUW** were present in the **LUW** conference room and representatives of other administration units were connected online. It was the only possible way to consult quickly and efficiently with many entities. The technical support for the hybrid conferences was provided by the **LUW** IT specialists. This unusual crisis has forced all external entities with whom the **LUW** communicates to accept the adaptation to this innovative communication channel.

Currently, **LUW** and its external partners declare that hybrid conferences will be continued. In their opinion, it is a very good innovation, which allows you to save time to travel from the area of the Lubuskie Voivodship to the **LUW** headquarters¹⁵ and save travel costs. The quality and efficiency of hybrid conferences are not inferior to conferences at the **LUW** headquarters. Adapting to online meetings accelerated the development of digital competencies, especially in small communes in the voivodship. Simultaneously, it confirmed and strengthened the **LUW** as a leader of innovation in the region and an example for other administration entities.

¹⁵ The Lubuskie Voivodship's area covers 3 988 km²

3.4 Being open to various forms of contact with citizens

During the pandemic, the main problem and challenge were to keep the **LUW** accessible to citizens. When the office was closed, innovative solutions had to be introduced quickly, so that citizens would not feel cut off from access to administration and reduce a sense of loneliness in the difficult situation of crisis and lockdown. Citizens expected the official availability as well as the accessibility of the **LUW**. **LUW** officials had a sense of mission and responsibility for the public good, thanks, i.e., to the use of the CAF.

Several innovations were implemented to ensure the citizen's contact with **LUW**. First of all, telephone calls were redirected from the office to the private telephones of officials who worked in the home office. The citizen was not even aware of talking to an official who did not work in the office but worked at home. There were very frequent situations when officials answered calls from citizens outside their normal working hours. Citizens called asking for help regarding tasks without being covered by **LUW**, but they could not reach another office competent in a given matter. Thanks to the immediately implemented system of call forwarding, **LUW** was available to the citizen at all times. Another innovation to provide citizens with the possibility of submitting applications and letters was the ordering of a very large and more capacious box, which was placed in front of the **LUW**, where citizens could put their applications. Another innovation concerned the introduction of a system for citizens to arrange visits to the office. The citizen had an appointed time of admission, the official waited for him at the door to the office and accepted the documents. The COVID-19 pandemic has also forced a change in citizens' attitudes. Namely, many matters in public administration offices can be settled electronically by a citizen, but an electronic signature is required for this. To facilitate access for citizens to obtain an electronic signature when entering the **LUW**, a computer was positioned in a way that citizens could use to obtain an electronic signature. An employee of **LUW** was helping them.

Currently, after restoring the office to normal operation, several of these innovative solutions have been kept in force. The possibility of using a computer at the entrance to the **LUW** was left to use so that a citizen could obtain an electronic signature in a situation having no access to the Internet at home or being unable to do it by themselves. The Citizen Service Office is alongside and officials assist the citizen if he or she does not have the appropriate digital competencies. There is also the box still available at the entrance where

citizens can put letters and applications. The possibility for a citizen to make an appointment for a specific time has been maintained, the official accompanies the citizen who is looking for the right room on one's own. Employees who will be assigned to work in the home office in the future will benefit from the procedure developed in the pandemic for redirecting telephone calls from the office to the official's private telephone.

3.5. From only working in the office to a flexible home office arrangement

Before the pandemic, all employees worked in the office. Certain employees worked 8 hours per day, and some of them work on a 12-hour on-call basis.

At the time of the announcement of the Covid-19 outbreak in Poland, the Director-General of **LUW** had to decide on new rules for the work organisation in the office. He was also obliged to decide which employees should be sent to work from home and which ones must work from the office. Due to the technical equipment and the working conditions, it was impossible to assign employees of the medical dispatching room and The Department of Safety and Crisis Management to work from home. The rest of the employees could be assigned to work from home. The following problems were found to be resolved: First of all, it was necessary to develop a procedure for delegating an employee to work from home. The document content of the employee secondment to work from home has evolved and been improved. This document had to comply with Polish law. The first version of this document contained the employee's home address. There was an obligation to work at the assigned address. However, it often met a problem because the employee moved from home or lived in different places. To solve this problem, a solution was developed that a specific address (apartment number, street) was no longer entered, but only the following entry: "the employee will work in the place of residence" without providing the address. The provision of relevant instruments for the home office was another problem. Within 2 days at the weekend, IT employees prepared a security and authentication system that allowed employees to log in safely to the **LUW** IT systems. Software tools for remote work were the third problem. However, the problem was resolved even before the pandemic as the "Electronic Document Circulation" system was implemented in the **LUW**. The COVID-19 crisis has only accelerated workers' moving away from the paper-based documentation system. Before the pandemic, some employees kept parallel documentation, both in the "Electronic Document Circulation" system and the one connected with paper-based documentation. It

was caused by getting used to working with paper documents and "limited trust" in online resources. Working in the home office caused the employees gradually wean from printing documents on paper and adopted "Electronic Document Circulation" as the main work tool.

The development of these innovative solutions forced by the pandemic COVID-19 improved the work in the office and is used now and will be continued in the future. These innovations will help **LUW** to organize work more flexibly, as very relevant procedures and tools for working in the home office have been developed. The organization indicated that it has very practical experience regarding home office and will continue to use this form of work, although to a much lesser extent.

"These remote work experiences can be used in future crises or even in the situation of women on parental leave, who would like to come back to work¹⁶. They can then work remotely."

4. Lessons learned for resilience

4.1. Lessons learned from the crisis

The **LUW** experience during the COVID-19 crisis indicated that good **crisis leadership** was a key factor in maintaining the resilience of the organization and preparing the organisation for the crisis.

Good leadership includes thinking strategically and anticipating future events, and is open to new concepts and management models in administration, e.g. participatory management. Secondly, a successful leader invests in the employee through training, supports and motivates employees, and sets a good example. Thirdly, the leadership maintains positive relations with the environment by supporting and giving an example to external organizations. The **LUW** provided continuing information and the willingness to cooperate in unpredictable situations thanks to the positive and friendly contacts with other organisations. The organisation's external partners indicated that during the COVID-19 crisis, it was crucial that **LUW** leadership, e.g. the Director-General and Director of the Department of Safety and Crisis Management were constantly available and answered phone calls, even at weekends, or at night. Regarding **LUW**, it was also crucial that the voivode had direct

¹⁶ This is an essential innovation, with significant importance for **LUW**, because over 75% of employees are women.

contact with the central government and was kept informed of the government's initiatives to respond efficiently to the COVID-19.

“A leader is important, who gives impetus but is also available. The decisions are better (those under time pressure) the more information we have. So communication is important. Quickly and efficiently acquired information allows making good decisions.”

According to one of the key partners of the organisation: *“The intuitiveness, gift of observation, and farsightedness of the **LUW** leader (Director-General) are above average. My experience from several years of cooperation indicates that the solutions are ahead of others and proved that they have been successful in the **LUW** and are being followed in other offices in Poland. We can gain the experience and example gathered in the **LUW**.”*

Digitalisation is important but doesn't solve everything because some

people/customers/employees still want the human touch. Therefore, accessibility for the citizen is important, as well as creating flexible and various forms of contact. It allows the organization to operate efficiently, without limiting access and causing citizen frustration. If certain access channels become impossible to be used, it is important to react quickly and flexible and create new access channels to the office, e.g. introduce a phone redirection and request employees while answering calls from citizens to be sensitive to the citizen's affairs. **LUW** employees often received calls from desperate citizens who could not reach another office because of a lockdown. One of the areas of CAF improvement was the project *“Humanly-oriented administration that is a socially sensitive clerk”*. The COVID-19 crisis has indicated the importance of the organizational improvement aspect in building resilience.

“The COVID-19 pandemic and CAF have strengthened the official's responsibility for the citizen, we feel the essence of making decisions in crises.”

The respondents also indicated the paradoxical phenomenon that before the pandemic, citizens demanded electronic service, and when the **LUW** implemented electronic support (during the lockdown) they demanded personal contact with an official in the **LUW**. Certainly, **LUW** offers various forms of communication - depending on the citizen's preferences (personal, telephone, or remote contacts).

On the other hand, the crisis signified how crucial this value is for the employee. The employee is not a soulless stamping machine in a bureaucratic world, he or she also needs the support of others, both from management and colleagues. Supporting bottom-up initiatives creates a sense of belonging to a community and enhances the creativity and productivity of the employee. It allows for maintaining mental and physical well-being. The

work in "task teams", which continued during the pandemic, and staying in touch with other employees gave them a sense of normality.

The **LUW** experience has indicated that **work from home is possible** and, what's more, it can be performed as efficiently as working in an office. To achieve it, on the one hand, technical resources are necessary, namely, the IT Department must be constantly improved. Properly prepared software allows monitoring the working time and the efficiency of the official's work online. On the other hand, human resources, i.e. a substantively prepared employee who is supported and motivated by the management, are decisively essential. The pandemic has signified that working from home, valuable training used by employees is also possible.

LUW experience also indicated that the onset of the crisis and the initial uncertainty of how the situation would develop, such as how contagious the COVID-19 virus might be, was the most difficult period. Therefore, the intensity of vertical and horizontal communication increases significantly, and the flow of information and messages is very crucial. After developing appropriate procedures for operating in the new conditions, the situation becomes secure. Employees get used to new procedures.

Paradoxically, **LUW** provided that each crisis strengthens the organisation because of developing procedures and solutions that can be used in the next crisis. As in the case of the **LUW**. The first crisis of Bird flu and AZS resulted in the improvement of public procurement procedures. In the COVID-19 crisis, procedures for transferring to work in the home office, procedures for sending employees to other job positions, and flexible working time were developed.

The experience of the crisis also strengthened the belief in the fundamental need for strategic thinking, anticipating possible crises, and preparing emergency procedures.

These experiences strengthened the **LUW's** resilience and contributed to the operation of another crisis, namely the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine and the exposure to flows of refugees.

In the pandemic, an important role was played by hybrid conferences, when there was a need to provide information to all entities or agree on the actions of all entities involved in crisis management. Telephone contacts were equally important. External organisations said that it was very important for them to have direct telephone contact with **LUW** management

and employees from **LUW**. The intensity of these conversations was tremendous. Managers of external organisations said they valued the willingness of **LUW** management to contact and make conversations. Issues were first confirmed by phone to gain time.

4.2. The role of CAF in resilience

Fig.4. Impact of CAF in improving the resilience categories in the **LUW**

Resilience category	1	2	3	4	5
ability to learn (reflective)				X	
limiting the spread of failure (robust)				X	
can easily repurpose resources (resourceful)					X
has alternative strategies (flexible)				X	
has backup capacity (redundant)				X	
includes broad consultation and communication(inclusive)					X
and has systems working together (integrated)				X	

LUW highly assessed the category of "ability to learn" because thanks to the use of CAF, the organisation has undoubtedly become a learning organization. Employees are willing to look for new opportunities there to achieve the desired results, create new patterns of non-stereotypical thinking, develop teamwork and constantly gain knowledge.

The category of "integrated working" and "broad consultation and communication" was assessed both as high and very high because, according to the organisation, CAF promotes the integration of employees, and supports building a network of cooperation between departments and between management levels in **LUW**, as well as allows to get acquainted with employees from different departments and exchange experiences. Therefore, it is easier to create new ideas, brainstorm, take different perspectives into account, and look for the best solutions together. As a result, a culture of cooperation, trust, and shared responsibility for the organisation is formed. The CAF has greatly helped in transforming the **LUW** from a rigid, hierarchical, anonymous bureaucratic organisation into a flexible, more agile organisation, with employees who like and value their work, and want to improve their development to do their best. This results in openness to innovation and the willingness of employees to engage in the process of improving the organisation.

*“We are lucky that the management is open to our ideas. We can hear: “do it, try it.” We get support if the idea is good and if the direction to achieve it is incorrect we are advised how to do it. It happens that the Voivode or **LUW** Director-General take part in our activities, for instance, they stand in a queue with us to hold the laboratory tests.”*

The CAF's impact on building the resilience of the organisation concerning the "resourceful" category was also highly assessed. By working out the "Task Teams" mechanism, positive energy and employee involvement in searching for new areas of employee activity were released. The organisation began to engage in pro-social projects for the benefit of citizens and for the employees, which greatly strengthened the image of the organisation externally and significantly increased the assessment of the organization by internal and external customers. The crisis indicated how important it is to have a loyal and committed employee.

Thanks to CAF, it was possible to focus on improving internal and external communication channels. This was crucial for effective crisis management.