

The European Union is an extremely complex structure, in which the interests of the Member States and EU institutions clash. The decision-making processes that occur there are hard to comprehend unless someone participates in them directly or invests a lot of time and effort to analyze them. This project attempts to shed more light on those processes by focusing on a specific area of the EU antipoverty policy.

Combating poverty in the EU is characterized by the fact that EU institutions have little legal mandate to influence how Member States formulate their poverty policies. However, at least from the beginning of the century attempts have been made to coordinate activities in this area within the EU. In 2010, when the current European development strategy – the Europe 2020 strategy – was designed, a significant modification was introduced. It was agreed that a headline target to lift over 20 million of people out of poverty by 2020 will be introduced along with a set of indicators to measure progress towards it. Individual states, including Poland, have also set their own poverty targets. Achieving a compromise between the Member States around what target to adopt and how to measure progress towards it was a fairly long and difficult process, as some countries contested the very need of any common target and indicators.

The main goal of the project is to identify whether and in which situations those indicators negotiated with such a great difficulty are used to put pressure on Member States to modify and improve their anti-poverty policies. One way of exerting pressure in this area is to show that according to these measures of poverty, the situation in some of the Member States has deteriorated compared to other countries. International and supranational organizations often use indicators in this way. The most well-known examples of such activities include the PISA rankings supervised by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), which are known for influencing education reforms undertaken by various countries or credit risk assessments conducted by various rating agencies (transnational corporations) that lead to modifications in economic policy.

The project also focus on the political negotiations associated with the process of taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy in the area of poverty and the role of poverty indicators in this process. The basic task will be to uncover political games that will probably appear when summarizing this strategy, especially that the EU target in the area of poverty will most probably not be achieved. The process of selecting a new strategy in the field of poverty will also be examined, and above all whether new indicators will be selected and whether this will cause disputes between Member States and the European Commission.

Finally, the project will also address the very structure of poverty indicators used to measure the poverty target. We will look at which dimensions of poverty are captured by these indicators and which dimensions remain invisible or blurred (e.g. extreme poverty). Finally, we will consider the impact of political negotiations on the final shape of indicators.

Taking up this topic is also of practical importance. There is an ongoing debate within the EU about the deficit of democracy, that is, that the citizens of the community have little influence on decision making, and the decision-making processes themselves are not transparent to them. The project will contribute to making these processes a bit more transparent, at least in area of anti-poverty policy.