
SOCIAL ALERT

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Professor Piotr Augustyniak
Konrad Ciesiołkiewicz
Ignacy Dudkiewicz
Aleksandra Fandrejewska-Tomczyk
Professor Barbara Gąciarz
Anna Korzeniewska
Professor Cezary Obracht-Prondzyński
Agnieszka Pacut, PhD
Michał Przedlacki
Barbara Sadowska
Joanna Sadzik
Alek Tarkowski, PhD
Kuba Wygnański

Let us save the most vulnerable, let us be a community

The most vulnerable and least individual people: the homeless, the poor, the residents of social care homes or people with disabilities are even less self-contained during the epidemic. Their current situation, as in the lens, reflects the weaknesses of health care, social assistance or the support system for non-governmental organisations.

In an exceptional situation of the pandemic, it must be borne in mind that an important part of the non-governmental sector are organisations which, apart from the medical services, are “frontlines” and should be supported in their activities more than usual.

Right now, and also after the pandemic, relations between neighbours, colleagues, the bonds that arise in local communities, are really important. Empathy, mutual self-support and kindness are values that become a condition for maintaining dignity and normality which have often been ignored in times of economic prosperity and unrestricted consumption. The idea of social solidarity is now taking on a real meaning. Therefore, the second issue that we are currently paying attention to is social self-support.

The pandemic exposes problems existing so far

Already in numerous social care homes, coronavirus was detected in dozens of patients: both the residents and the staff. From the information provided by the media, it is concluded that in such situations the procedures for

dealing with the cases are ineffective (because they simply do not exist). To ensure that NGOs, informal groups and citizens can offer help during the epidemic, rapid and decisive actions are required. Hereinafter, there are our recommendations for administrative authorities, including local self-governments:

1. Carrying out a diagnosis of urgent financial and material needs of social care centres and NGOs providing support for the groups of the weakest and most vulnerable in need of support. The implementation of plans of raising and distributing money for their operation. Financial resources for social support should be increased during the pandemic. Under no circumstances should they be reduced.
2. Quick release of available EU funds that can be used by NGOs to prevent the effects of the epidemic.
3. Agreements on this matter with non-governmental organisations' operating facilities and other forms of support for those who are in need. We have to talk and develop rapid and effective forms of security together, and not to create centralised and bureaucratic operational methods. A new model of cooperation is required: administration (including self-governments) – the third sector. The work within the framework of advisory bodies means that they are unable to coordinate quick actions.
4. The inclusion of already operating groups acting under the authorities of various levels into the epidemic prevention and support measures of volunteers and NGOs, e.g. volunteer fire brigades. Local self-governments should ensure that employees of libraries, sports centres or cultural institutions become local support and self-assistance animators. The local self-government

should coordinate such activities or encourage them to engage in the activities of other entities.

5. Providing social care centres (DPS), care and treatment facilities (ZOL), child care facilities and other institutions with the necessary personal protective equipment.
6. The effective elaboration of procedures and the creation of isolation facilities for persons who require it for social reasons, e.g. due to homelessness or for those who live in families where domestic violence takes place and they need to be quarantined.
7. Creating a platform with information on the simultaneous needs of organisations, health care facilities and opportunities of local companies, NGOs and volunteers.

Our proposal for the social leaders, NGOs and the local community:

1. Taking advantage of the potential of employee volunteering in the fight against the pandemic. These activities can provide very specific support as teams of people from workplaces have important resources: a network of connections based on trust, recognised information and cooperation systems and often a space – a specific place or work equipment.

Epidemic poses new challenges for NGOs and the society

The economic collapse (in the macroeconomic and micro-economic dimensions – individual and family ones) will be the effect of the epidemic. The group of people in need of various forms of support, from financial

and material to psychological ones, will grow rapidly. For NGOs it means that more people will expect support from them, with fewer people, institutions and companies supporting them. It is also worth, already now, designing and conducting research, the result of which will be a diagnosis of social living conditions in isolation and the need to perform many activities (including work and education). It will create a map with a comprehensive understanding of mental well-being and the dangers related to shortages of domestic relationships, work-related remote relationships and increasing numbers of negative social phenomena: the increase in unemployment, the increase in poverty or domestic violence. Such a comprehensive diagnosis will make it possible to design social and cultural interventions.

Our recommendations for administrative authorities, including local self-governments:

1. Development of financial support rules for NGOs similar to what is offered to companies. Important factors: exemptions in the payment of public tributes so that NGOs can continue to employ workers and maintain venues and facilities.
2. Creating a support system for volunteers and local social support systems. They should include tax exemptions for companies supporting NGOs. Here, it is worth introducing a mechanism of partial write-offs e.g. 1% CIT – it does not increase the burden on companies, but allows them to precisely allocate money for the support. Local self-governments should also be involved in the volunteers' activities, if only by providing transport.
3. Creating an accessible self-support system: platforms enabling the exchange of information, coordination and cooperation of citizens and various organisations, institutions and companies operating in the same community. It is necessary to

sort out the GDPR issues – extraordinary interpretations of the regulations are necessary as they prevent the transmission of information on persons in need among the institutions and make it difficult to coordinate the support activities.

4. Launching grants for organisations dealing, in a systematic form, with psychological crises, including violence (e.g. Blue Line, We Give Children Strength Foundation), in order to expand the scale of activities and support for the functioning of the hotline.
5. Support (logistical, and wherever it is possible, financial support) for spontaneous social entrepreneurship.

Our proposal for social leaders, NGOs and the local community:

1. Sharing experiences and good practices with other organisations, using existing information platforms, social media, but also local self-government websites.
2. It is important that various NGOs work together, network, act together, and not organise the same activities on their own (and in parallel) in the same place.

In the epidemic conditions, community self-support is spontaneously growing, but it is also worth mobilising

Self-support activities bring with them something utterly important – the willingness to act. All over Poland there are many people of good will who eagerly want to help others. The existing potential should be used and a solidarity civil protection system should be built on it. It

is important for us all to understand that the principle of self-support means that we are involved in it by means of working together (offering our time, competences or practical skills) rather than paying donations. In order for community self-support to be effective, care is needed to maintain and intensify the sense of community, not only for the “stay home” time, but also for the period that will follow the pandemic. Self-support and acts of social solidarity have huge potential. However, they will not replace and will not release the state from the obligation to deal with the effects of the pandemic both now and for the forthcoming months and years. As a civil society, we should demand from the state to act in the spheres of its most important responsibility and the most important systems of public policy.

At the moment, a large part of social activity, including the self-support movement, is focused on social networks, especially on Facebook. The fact that we have access to such communication capabilities is an asset for a society that is forced to live online. However, the dependence on these services is also revealed, in various spheres of remote life online. It is worth remembering this, if only because these platforms are ineffective in the fight against disinformation.

Our recommendations for administrative authorities, including local self-governments:

1. Creating a permanent and effective framework for social dialogue/consultation with the NGO sector so that it can support the authorities in social actions. The lack of a common strategy has always been a problem, but now it is particularly burning.
2. Focusing on cooperation with NGOs so that NGOs fulfil the tasks outsourced by the state and local self-governments, consisting in financing all the forms of support for building the competences necessary in the labour market, such as retraining, career advisory services, trainings, etc. The key

should be to rely on organisations that are local and closer to the places where people live and act: in the residential zones, in culture clubs or in parishes, etc.

3. Revitalisation of the neighbourhood functions becomes an urgent need. The natural environment with which we have to coexist and interact is our neighbourhood (in a multi-apartment building, in a district, in a residential zone, or in a village). In many places, such actions require an external impulse – it should come out of the already existing structures, such as housing cooperatives or real estate administration entities. Actions are required by local authorities dealing with the housing economy, their social assistance services, etc. – establishing direct contacts with specific communities and encouraging residents to create basic forms of self-organisation.

Our proposal for social leaders, NGOs and local communities:

1. The basis for social support actions is good communication, open circulation and access to information. Some social organisations have to take on the task of managing communication skills in order to be able to reach communities that are doomed to “information monoculture”.
2. An important pillar of social action is the skilful sharing of experience and knowledge (education for self-organisation), but also resources (e.g. equipment), including the creation of common resources that can be used by various social stakeholders.

Above all, we need fast and well-targeted actions (SAVE THE MOST VULNERABLE) but, in parallel, let us form a local government of social experts. The voice of such self-government will be more prominent than the voice of a

single entity, a person or a non-governmental organisation.

Social alerts are an initiative of the Open Eyes Economy think tank and the Faculty of Public Economy and Administration of the University of Economics in Krakow.

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