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## **FOOD AID BENEFICIARIES AND THE OPERATION OF A FOOD BANK: A MIXED-METHODS CASE STUDY FROM POZNAŃ<sup>2</sup>**

Keywords: food bank, food aid, food insecurity, vulnerable groups, Poland

**ABSTRACT.** Food banks play a crucial role within the support network for individuals experiencing food insecurity, however, knowledge about their operations remains limited. This exploratory study aims to provide an initial understanding of the characteristics of food aid beneficiaries and the functioning of the Food Bank in Poznań (FBP), as viewed from both beneficiary and management perspectives. A mixed-methods approach was employed. The quantitative component consisted of a structured survey conducted using the PAPI method with 82 food aid recipients between December 2024 and January 2025. The questionnaire included demographic variables such as age, gender, household type, education, employment status, migration background, self-assessed health, and disability status. To identify distinct groups among beneficiaries, K-means clustering was applied as an exploratory technique, resulting in three profiles differentiated by age, gender, health status, and disability. To complement these findings, a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with the Director of the FBP. The interview addressed topics including beneficiary characteristics, food logistics, cooperation with partner organizations, and operational challenges. The results highlight the heterogeneity of food aid recipients and the evolving role of food banks. Beyond distributing surplus food, the FBP increasingly responds to emerging social crises and provides non-food support, positioning itself as a key actor within the broader social assistance system in Poland.

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## INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity continues to be a challenge from global, national, household, and individual perspectives. In Europe and North America, the prevalence of undernourishment is less than 2.5%, although about 7.5% of the population in Poland faces moderate or severe food insecurity. For comparison, in Bulgaria and Romania this problem affects around 16% of the population (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, 2023). In the United States, Canada, and Australia, food insecurity concerns between 10% and 21% of the population (Miller, Li, 2022; Rabbitt, Reed-Jones, Hales, Burke, 2024).

At the same time, according to the FAO (2019), approximately 1.3 billion tonnes of food are wasted worldwide each year. At the EU level, slightly more than 59 million tonnes of food are wasted annually, translating to 132 kg per inhabitant (Eurostat, 2024). In Poland, these numbers are over 4.5 million tonnes and 123 kg per inhabitant, respectively. Food is wasted at various stages of the supply chain, from initial agricultural production to final household consumption. Most food is wasted at the household level, and in Poland, this accounts for about 55% of total food waste.

Considering the above, food recovery and redistribution programmes, such as food banks, can help reduce food loss, promote the right to food, serve as effective forms of food assistance, and enhance individual food security (FAO, 2019). Food banks can be seen as a bridge connecting surplus food at risk of being wasted with people experiencing food insecurity. They can also be viewed as voluntary sector organizations that link the government, private, and civil sectors (Mook, Murdock, Gundersen, 2020). Research on food banks contributes to both theoretical debates and empirical studies concerning poverty (Bradshaw, 2007; Addae-Korankye, 2018; Brady, 2019; Kalinowski, Łuczak, Szczygieł, 2025), social exclusion (Sen, 1998; Garthwaite, 2016; Juma, Fernández-Sainz, 2024), social policy (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Evers, Laville, 2004; Andersen, 2012), and sustainable development (Gottlieb, Joshi, 2010; Papargyropoulou, Lozano, Steinberger, Wright, Bin Ujang, 2014; Geisendorf, Pietrulla, 2018).

In the face of the ongoing food security problem in Poland, food bank activities play an important and complementary role in an underfunded and overburdened social system. In 2022, approximately 1.4 million people in Poland benefited from food bank support. The activity of food banks in Poland suggests that malnutrition affects approximately 3% of the Polish population (Banki Żywności, 2023). At the same time, there is a lack of systematic research on the subject, such as the scale of the food insecurity problem in Poland, its dynamics, the groups particularly vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition, or the coping strategies households adopt to deal with food insecurity.

In our exploratory study, we aim to partly fill this gap and to provide a preliminary understanding of the food assistance process carried out by the Food Bank in Poznań (FBP), focusing on two dimensions:

- 1) structure and diversity of food aid recipients based on selected demographic and vulnerability indicators;
- 2) operational model of FBP, including food acquisition, redistribution strategies, and cooperation with partner organizations.

In line with the exploratory character of the research, we do not formulate specific hypotheses. Instead, we pose the following research questions:

1. What are the key characteristics of the beneficiaries supported by the FBP?
2. How does the FBP operate in terms of logistics, partnerships, and crisis response?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the next section presents the research materials and methods; then, the literature review on the food bank general concept is reported; the following sections display the research results; and the final section provides the conclusions.

## RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the profile of beneficiaries and the functioning of the FBP from the perspectives of both its recipients and its management.

The first part of the study was based on a structured questionnaire administered using the PAPI (Paper and Pencil Interview) method. The survey was conducted among 82 beneficiaries of the FBP between December 18, 2024, and January 14, 2025. A purposive sampling strategy was applied, targeting individuals receiving food aid through partner institutions cooperating with the FBP. Participation in the survey and interview was voluntary and anonymous. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their consent to participate. The research adhered to ethical standards for social research, including confidentiality and data protection.

The questionnaire included both demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, education, employment status, migration background, household type) and questions related to health status and disability. Although the study is exploratory in nature and limited in sample size, it aimed to provide an indicative socio-demographic profile of food aid recipients in the Greater Poland region. To identify distinct groups among the beneficiaries, a clustering analysis was performed using the KMeans algorithm. Prior to clustering, categorical variables were encoded numerically, and age ranges were converted to approximate numerical values. The optimal number of clusters was determined using the elbow method, which indicated three distinct clusters.

To complement the findings from the survey, a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with a member of the FBP's management staff. This method allowed for the collection of detailed insights into the institution's operations, strategies for addressing

social needs, and operational challenges. The interviewee was Katarzyna Bielawska, Director of the FBP, who has extensive experience in managing a food bank. She was selected due to her access to both strategic and operational information. The interview was conducted in person at the FBP headquarters on January 14, 2025, and lasted approximately 70 minutes. With the respondent's consent, the interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed in full. The qualitative data from the interview were analysed using thematic content analysis. Emerging themes were identified manually by the researchers based on repeated readings of the transcript. The interview guide covered four main thematic areas:

- 1) profile and needs of beneficiaries,
- 2) logistics and food sourcing,
- 3) cooperation with partners and public institutions,
- 4) operational and regulatory challenges.

The article includes representative responses for each thematic category.

## FOOD BANKS GENERAL INSIGHT

Food banks are non-profit organizations designed to alleviate food insecurity by receiving, storing, and distributing food to individuals and families in need (Middleton, Mehta, McNaughton, Booth, 2018). These institutions play a crucial role in the social safety net, particularly in high-income countries, where they serve as emergency food providers for low-income households struggling to meet basic nutritional needs (Oldroyd, Eskandari, Pratt, Lake, 2022). Food banks – initially perceived primarily as instruments of emergency social assistance – are becoming a permanent feature of social policy, or rather an indicator of its structural deficiencies. The number of food bank beneficiaries in highly developed countries is increasing (Davis, Sengul Orgut, Ivy, Brock, Miles, 2014; Middleton et al., 2018; Capodistrias, Szulecka, Corciolani, Strøm-Andersen, 2022), which is linked to rising levels of poverty and social marginalization, especially following the 2008 financial crisis (Loopstra et al., 2015) and the Covid-19 pandemic (Capodistrias et al., 2022). Food banks mitigate the effects of household food insecurity, but they do not eliminate it (Rizvi, Wasfi, Enns, Kristjansson, 2021; Warshawsky, 2023). Nor do they address the root causes of deep social exclusion, such as low income (Black, Seto, 2018), lack of access to employment (Hayes, Maynard, 2024), housing problems (Clair, Fledderjohann, Lalor, Loopstra, 2020), or inadequate social support (Beck, Gwilym, 2023). The use of food banks may also deepen exclusion processes among beneficiaries, as it is often associated with feelings of shame or loss of autonomy (Douglas, Sapko, Kiezebrink, Kyle, 2015; Pineau, Williams, Brady, Waddington, Frank, 2021). The role of food banks as a substitute for the state social security system incorporates into broader debates on the responsibilities of the public social policy in supporting household food security

(Lambie-Mumford, 2019; Beck, Gwilym, 2023). In fact, food banks may allow governments to shift the responsibility for this issue onto charitable organizations (Middleton et al., 2018).

Food banks operate by collecting surplus food from various sources – including supermarkets, local farms, and food producers – thereby reducing food waste while simultaneously addressing hunger within communities. Their operations often involve partnerships with other charitable organizations, social services, and community agencies that refer directly with the needed population (González-Torre, Coque, 2015). Recipients may access food through models such as food pantries and meal programs, which provide immediate and direct support to those experiencing food insecurity (Black, Seto, 2018; Capodistrias et al., 2022).

The first food bank – St. Mary’s Food Bank was founded in 1967 in the United States in Phoenix, Arizona. It was established by John Van Hengel, who is perceived as the founder of the modern food bank concept. The idea of food bank has since spread across more than fifty countries on six continents (The Global FoodBanking Network). In Europe, the first food bank was launched in France in Paris in 1984. Today, food banks in Europe collaborate within the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA), which embraces 25 full members and 5 associate members across thirty European countries.

Although food banks share general characteristics, the structures, operational models, and funding sources of food banks vary depending on socio-economic context (Akkerman, Busiman, Crujssen, de Leeuw, Haijema, 2023). They are shaped by the specific historical contexts and environments in which they function (González-Torre, Coque, 2015). For example, American food banks combine private sector features, government support, and citizen voluntarism (Mook et al., 2020). In contrast, British food banks are independent from the state and operate as a network of the faith-based food banks under a franchise model developed by the Trussell Trust (Mook et al., 2020). Germany’s “Tafel” system operates as a network of local food banks without formal government referrals and relying mainly on volunteers, what reflects strong community involvement (Simmet, Tinnemann, Stroebele-Benschop, 2018). In France, food banks address food insecurity through programs combining food distribution with healthy eating education (Martin-Fernandez, Grillo, Parizot, Caillavet, Chauvin, 2013; Michalis, Costarelli, 2020). Similar to South Korean food banks which combine food distribution with health programs to fight hunger and promote better eating habits (Kim, J., Kim, W., Kim, J., 2019). Swiss food banks are organized by local committees and NGOs, focusing on supporting people in crisis, including immigrants and refugees (Hermans, Cantillon, Marchal, 2024). In Canada, food banks have become central in combating poverty and hunger, especially as social welfare budgets have been cut, and are often linked to rehabilitation and family support programs (Tarasuk et al., 2014a).

In Poland, the concept of food banks was introduced in the 1990s. In 1993 in Warsaw on the initiative of Jacek Kuroń, the first SOS Food Bank was established operating under the SOS Social Assistance Foundation. In the following years, similar initiatives were launched in other cities (Wielicka-Regulska, Mitmańska, Kiss, 2018). In 1997, the existing food banks formed the Federation of Polish Food Banks (FPFB) – a community of independent non-governmental organizations operating as associations or foundations. The FPFB is also a member of the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA).

The FPFB currently brings together 31 food banks operating across the country. The Federation's task is to promote the idea of food banks, represent their interests, and coordinate their activities at the national level. Its mission is to save food from going to waste and distribute it to the most vulnerable, which translates into activities such as collecting surplus food from producers, distributors, and shops; distributing it to local partner organizations; implementing major food aid programs; and running educational projects to promote food waste prevention (Banki Żywności, 2023). In 2023, Federation of Polish Food Banks cooperated with 3,400 charities, including canteens, community centres, shelters, educational centres, hospices, support centres for single mothers, children's homes, and other institutions assisting those in need. Polish food banks provided assistance to about 1.5 million people – approximately 3,9% of the Polish population – by distributing 32.5 thousand tonnes of food (FEPZ, 2022)

In Poznań, the Food Bank (FBP) was established in 1996, and in 1997 it became the member and founder of the Federation of Polish Food Banks. Food Bank in Poznań operates generally within the Greater Poland voivodship, the region of living for approximately 3.5 million inhabitants, which is about 9% of the country's population. There is a problem of household's food insecurity and material deprivation looking through the prism of the food bank work. In 2022, FBP raised a total of 2.6 thousand tonnes of food products, which was mainly sourced from the producers' and distributors' donations (42%), supermarkets and wholesalers (36%) and Operational Programme Food Aid (20%). The FBP's food resources benefited 148 recipients, such as NGOs, local government institutions and care facilities (WBŻ, 2022). The Food Bank in Poznań reaches approximately 100,000 people with food aid every year (WBŻ, 2025), which corresponds to approximately 2.8% of the population of Greater Poland region. The actual scale of the problem concerning food aid recipients is not well understood, as there are no systematic and comprehensive studies monitoring it either at the local or national level, from the perspective of both beneficiaries and food banks. In the Greater Poland region, the challenges related to food assistance may be underestimated – especially given that in comparison to national level: the average monthly wage is lower, the at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers is higher, and a greater number of households rate their material situation as very bad or bad (US Poznań, 2025).

## RESEARCH RESULTS

In the study conducted among the beneficiaries of the FBP, the majority were women, accounting for 56%. Approximately half of the respondents were under the age of 55, while nearly 32% were between 56 and 65 years old (Table 1). Within the research sample, 55% of respondents lived in single-person households. Single parents comprised one-quarter of the sample, and families with children (including both single parents and couples with children) collectively represented nearly 32% of the surveyed beneficiaries.

The clustering analysis revealed three distinct groups of beneficiaries based on their socio-demographic profiles (Table 2). The clustering analysis highlights the heterogeneity among food aid recipients in the Greater Poland region. Cluster 0 represents older women facing compounded vulnerabilities due to poor health and moderate disability. Cluster 1 includes middle-aged men who, despite being unemployed, do not report significant health issues or disabilities, suggesting temporary economic hardship. Cluster 2 comprises older men with severe disabilities and poor health, indicating a need for long-term support.

Table 1. Profile of the Greater Poland Food Bank's beneficiaries according to authors primary survey

Gender	female: 56%	male: 44%				
Migrant status	yes: 7%	no: 93%				
Age (yeras)	< 25: 3%	26-35: 7%	36-45: 19%	46-55: 20%	56-65: 32%	> 65: 19%
Household type	single-person: 55%	single parent: 25%	couple without children: 4%	couple with young children: 3%	couple with adult children: 4%	other: 9%
Education	primary: 52%	middle: 28%	vocational: 5%	higher: 5%	no or in vocational training: 10%	
Employment	not employed: 82%	full-time employed: 8%	part-time employed: 6%	occasional work: 3%	in education/training: 1%	
Disability certificate	no: 33%	yes, mild: 7%	yes, moderate: 43%	yes, severe: 17%		
Health self-assessment	very poor: 5%	poor: 30%	average: 51%	good: 11%	very good: 3	

Source: own survey

Table 2. Beneficiary clusters

Cluster	Number of individuals	Dominant gender	Average age	Employment status	Health assessment	Disability status
Cluster 0	28	women	55	unemployed	poor	moderate
Cluster 1	21	men	51	unemployed	average	none
Cluster 2	21	men	56	unemployed	poor	severe

Source: own survey

The results derived from our survey sample are in line with other research (Grabka, Schupp, 2022). For example, the survey of Banki Żywności (2023) revealed that among the Operational Programme Food Aid (OPFA) women and persons between 15 and 65 years old dominated. The beneficiaries of food banks exhibit diverse characteristics reflecting their vulnerability. Many come from low-income households facing severe financial constraints. Unemployed or underemployed individuals, single-parent families (especially female-headed households) or seniors often recipients of food bank services (Tarasuk, Dachner, Loopstra, 2014b). Housing instability is another key challenge, since many beneficiaries live in rented or temporary accommodations, contributing to their overall vulnerability (Clair, Fledderjohann, Lalor, Loopstra, 2019).

The results from the survey regarding beneficiary characteristics partly align with the insights obtained during the in-depth interview. According to the FBP representative, the primary recipients of assistance are elderly individuals, families with children, and, more recently, refugees. Crisis events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have led to noticeable shifts in the beneficiary profile, with an increase in single individuals, low-income families with children, large families, and refugees. Such observation are in line with the situation noted by other food banks in Europe (Capodistrias et al., 2022). While FBP provides food assistance to people from diverse backgrounds – including Ukrainians, Roma, Belarusians, and Hindus – in the current research sample, immigrants accounted for only 7% of respondents (Table 1). It should be noted, however, that the survey was conducted over a one-month period, which may have limited the ability to fully capture these demographic shifts.

A substantial portion of respondents, 62%, reported having only primary education or no formal education (Table 1). The remaining respondents had completed vocational, secondary, or higher education. In terms of employment status, 82% were unemployed, while the remainder reported working full-time, part-time, or occasionally. For those employed, reliance on food assistance may indicate that their earned income is insufficient to cover basic food needs. Notably, more than two-thirds (76%) of FBP beneficiaries

surveyed held a disability certificate (Table 1), that was also characteristic for two identified clusters (Table 2). Regarding self-assessed health status, 51% of respondents rated their health as average, and 30% as poor or very poor. Other research also shows that food bank beneficiaries experience high levels of food insecurity, often compounded by chronic health conditions such as diabetes or obesity, and many report poor dietary quality due to the inadequacy or imbalance of the food received (Oldroyd et al., 2022). Moreover, people with disabilities are frequently among food bank users (Tarasuk et al., 2014b).

Income level is typically the primary criterion for eligibility. However, in the context of economic crises, high inflation, and rising living costs, income from employment does not always guarantee sufficient disposable income to secure adequate food. Public discourse often refers to this vulnerable group as the “working poor” (Banki Żywności, 2023). These are individuals with low disposable incomes and high living costs (e.g., due to inflation, purchasing power of the minimum wage, housing costs), who also have limited access to social assistance because of income eligibility criteria. This makes them a group at risk of undernutrition. As highlighted by the FBP’s Director: “The Food Bank is a non-governmental organization, and its goal is also to direct this food aid to people who, for some reason, do not meet the criteria of social welfare centres”. Beneficiaries may thus include individuals with relatively higher incomes who, due to high living expenses, poor health, or unexpected life events, are left with minimal resources for survival and do not qualify for state support. Additionally, food bank assistance targets individuals facing sudden disruptions in food access caused by unforeseen crises. As emphasized by the interviewee, “That’s why we are a public benefit organization – to make this food available not only to people with no income at all, but above all to those who do have some income, but for various reasons, it is insufficient”.

It is important to emphasize that the FBP does not distribute food directly to individual beneficiaries but instead cooperates with partner aid institutions that deliver food and other items to those in need. Both the number of partner institutions receiving food aid and the volume of distributed products vary, primarily depending on donations from producers, distribution networks, and entities in the HORECA (hotel, restaurant, catering) sector. As explained by the interviewee, “The product groups we most often receive are vegetables, fruits, dairy products, meat products, and cold cuts, but above all, all those delicate products that have a very short shelf life or are sensitive to temperature changes – these are the ones we most often receive”. Food Banks are able to obtain a wide range of products that go beyond the scope of those offered under the OPFA, such as fresh fruits and vegetables or fish. For some beneficiaries, it is an opportunity to eat higher-quality products that they usually have to go without (Banki Żywności, 2023). In that context food bank also address the improvement of nutrition and sustainability of the food system (Capodistrias, et al., 2022; Oldroyd et al., 2022).

Beyond providing food assistance, FBP also carries out educational initiatives focused on topics such as food waste prevention and food safety. This dual approach enhances food security from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Malnutrition can take two forms: quantitative malnutrition, which refers to an insufficient caloric intake, and qualitative malnutrition, which involves deficiencies in micronutrients, protein, vitamins, or minerals. Notably, qualitative malnutrition can affect overweight individuals, posing a growing challenge in Poland, especially among children (Banki Żywności, 2023). Between 2021 and 2023, under the umbrella of the FPFB, 2,827 dietary workshops were organized.

In general, food banks play an important role in reducing hunger and food waste, improving the quality of life for people in need. As the number of individuals and families supported by food banks increases, their role has shifted from ad hoc food aid to a more permanent response to hunger (Daponte, Bade, 2006; Mook et al., 2020). Similar situation has been observed in the case of FBP. In addition to food and educational activities, FBP also responds to emerging crises, which broadens its areas of operation. While the organization's priority remains food provision, it also offers material aid such as clothing, personal hygiene products, masks, disinfectants, bedding, duvets, and blankets. This material assistance typically arises in response to special circumstances (COVID, war, natural disasters) and is often facilitated by specific aid campaigns coordinated by food banks. As described by the Director of FBP: "We are a warehouse for the storage, survival, and distribution of certain products that are not even present with us on a daily basis". Over its many years of operation, FBP has developed its own standards, procedures, and operational pathways. At the same time, the organization strives to maintain enough flexibility to respond effectively to emerging needs. However, the requirement to adapt to crises and undertake ad hoc actions remains a persistent challenge. As the interviewee noted, "On the one hand, we strive for professionalism because we want to do everything well, perfectly, etc., but on the other hand, the activities of non-governmental organizations – this subsidiarity – means that things happen very spontaneously. So, we cannot lose this character, because that is what we are here for".

The above actions show that the FBP, like other organizations, must respond to and adapt to crises and external threats (economic, environmental, political). Crisis situations can be used as a way of avoiding "business as usual" (Galanakis, 2020) and as an opportunity to strengthen a resilient and sustainable local food system (Giudice, Caferra, Morone, 2020). Research shows that food banks, including the Federation of Polish Food Banks (FPBZ), have successfully adopted various strategies to adapt to COVID crises (Capodistrias et al., 2022). However, as emphasized in both research and interviews, such actions represent a long-term process, and short-long mobilization can be treated as a lesson for future.

One of the major challenges faced currently by FBP is its limited local infrastructure and technical capacity, particularly the shortage of sufficiently large warehouse space, which constrains operational efficiency. Another pressing challenge involves logistics – including the collection and associated costs of gathering products. “In the past, when we started almost thirty years ago, companies actually transported them for us. At this moment, we collect practically 99% of them ourselves”. Product collection is handled either directly by FBP or, in smaller towns, by its partners. Challenges related to transportation and storage costs are also present in the day-to-day operations of food banks in other countries (Akkerman et al., 2023; Reusken, Cruijssen, Fleuren, 2023).

Another significant challenge in food bank operations involves legal regulations. Representatives of food banks were engaged in the development of the Polish Food Waste Prevention Act (Official Journal, 2019, item 1680), which introduced obligations for shops and supermarkets to transfer surplus food to food banks. These regulatory changes are generally assessed positively. According to the FBP representative, in the first year of the act’s implementation, the amount of food acquired by the organization increased by 200%. Nevertheless, the current legal framework still creates uneven competition between food banks and, for example, biofuel producers when it comes to access to surplus food. As the interviewee explained, “The idea behind this act is, of course, noble and much needed, but the technical nuances require adjustments. After two years of the act being in force, we are assessing and updating it to change what did not work in the system”.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory case study provides insights into the profile of food aid beneficiaries and the operational characteristics of the FBP, based on both quantitative data and qualitative stakeholder perspectives. The research shows that food insecurity in the Greater Poland region affects a diverse range of individuals, particularly those experiencing multiple vulnerabilities such as unemployment, low educational attainment, poor health, or disability. Importantly, some recipients report formal employment, yet still depend on food aid due to high living costs and limited access to public assistance.

The use of clustering techniques in social research provides valuable insights for policy makers and aid organizations to better allocate resources and design targeted interventions. Our findings underscore the importance of tailoring food aid and social support programs to the specific needs of different beneficiary groups. For instance, Cluster 0 may benefit from health-related interventions and social inclusion programs, while Cluster 2 requires integrated support involving healthcare and disability services.

The in-depth interview with the FBP's Director highlighted the evolving role of food banks in Poland. Beyond food redistribution, FBP provides material aid and engages in educational and crisis-response activities, positioning itself as a dynamic actor within the broader social assistance landscape. These functions are particularly relevant in the context of recurring economic shocks and humanitarian emergencies, where flexible and community-based organizations such as food banks can play a complementary role to state institutions.

However, the research has several limitations. The small sample size and the short duration of data collection restrict the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the survey was limited in scope and did not include economic indicators such as income or housing costs. Future research should therefore employ larger, more representative samples and integrate broader socioeconomic data to deepen understanding of food insecurity dynamics in Poland.

Despite these limitations, this study makes an important contribution to the limited empirical literature on food aid in Central and Eastern Europe. It demonstrates the value of using mixed-methods research to capture both the lived experiences of beneficiaries and the operational realities of food banks. It also calls attention to the need for more systematic monitoring of food insecurity at the local level, to inform responsive and equitable food assistance strategies.

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## ODBIORCY POMOCY ŻYWNOŚCIOWEJ I DZIAŁALNOŚĆ BANKU ŻYWNOŚCI: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU Z WYKORZYSTANIEM METOD MIESZANYCH BADAŃ Z POZNANIA

Słowa kluczowe: bank żywności, pomoc żywnościowa, bezpieczeństwo żywnościowe, grupy wrażliwe społecznie, Polska

**ABSTRAKT.** Banki żywności stanowią ważny element sieci wsparcia dla osób borykających się z brakiem bezpieczeństwa żywnościowego, jednak wiedza na temat ich funkcjonowania jest wciąż bardzo ograniczona. Celem badań było wstępne poznanie struktury odbiorców pomocy żywnościowej oraz sposobu działania Banku Żywności w Poznaniu, z perspektywy zarówno beneficjentów, jak i zarządzających. Zastosowano podejście metod mieszanych. Od grudnia 2024 do stycznia 2025 roku przeprowadzono ustrukturyzowane badania metodą PAPI wśród 82 odbiorców pomocy żywnościowej. Kwestionariusz obejmował cechy demograficzne, takie jak: wiek, płeć, typ gospodarstwa domowego, wykształcenie, status zatrudnienia, tło migracyjne, samoocena zdrowia i status niepełnosprawności. W celu zidentyfikowania wyraźnych grup wśród beneficjentów zastosowano analizę skupień metodą k-średnich, wyróżniając trzy profile na podstawie wieku, płci, stanu zdrowia i niepełnosprawności. Dla uzupełnienia wyników przeprowadzono półstrukturyzowany, pogłębiony wywiad z dyrektorem banku żywności. Wywiad koncentrował się na charakterystyce beneficjentów, logistyce żywności, współpracy z partnerami oraz wyzwaniach operacyjnych. Wyniki wskazują na zróżnicowanie odbiorców pomocy żywnościowej i ewoluującą rolę banków żywności. Poza dystrybucją nadwyżek żywności, bank żywności odpowiada na pojawiające się kryzysy społeczne i świadczy wsparcie pozażywnościowe, stając się istotnym aktorem w szerszej sieci pomocy społecznej w Polsce.

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