

Effective Local Government 2021: Territorial Self-government Units Secretaries Survey Report

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***TSU - Territorial Self-government Units**

Information about the study

The survey was conducted between November 2020 and February 2021 in the form of a questionnaire completed online (CAWI). The respondents were mostly secretaries of local government units. In some cases other individuals answered the questionnaire. In total, representatives of 2123 local government units from all over the country took part in the survey.

Figure 1: Geographical distribution of units participating in the survey

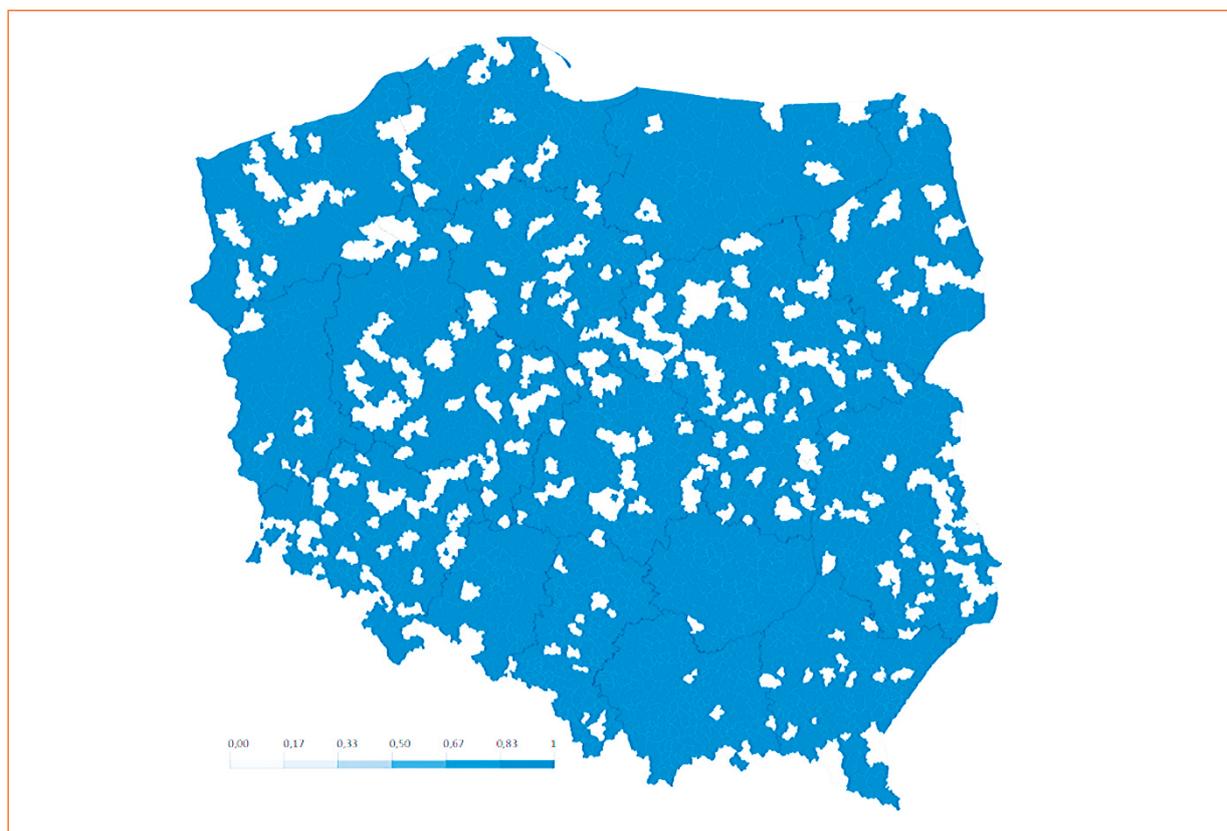
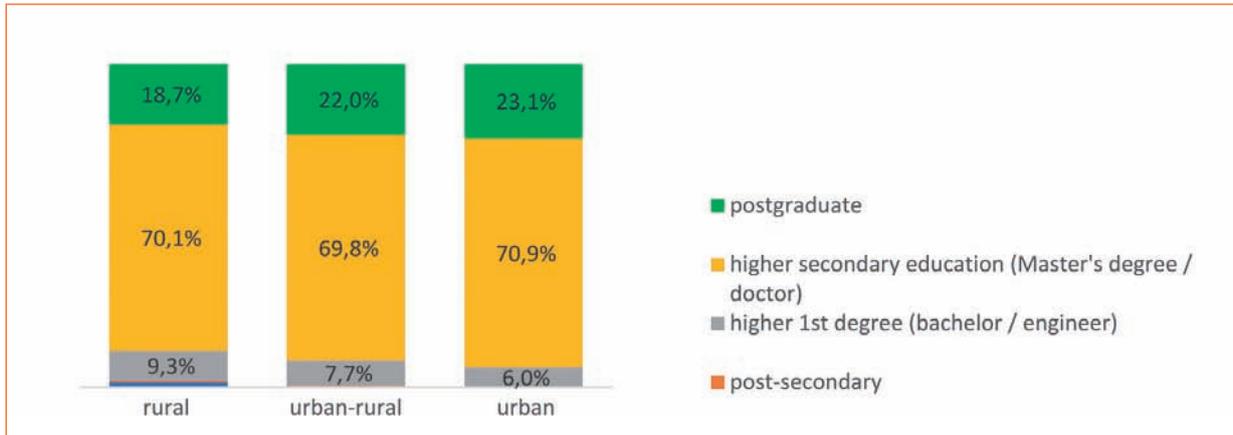


Table 1: Categories of respondents to the survey

	%
Municipal Secretary	86,9%
Deputy Mayor	4,9%
Head of Department	3,8%
Specialist departmental employee	1,8%
Serial worker	1,4%
Mayor	0,3%
Other	0,9%

The secretaries surveyed most often had a master's degree, many had post-graduate studies. There was little difference in the structure of education between different types of local government units.

Figure 2. Type of territorial self-government unit vs. education of the secretary



The secretaries who participated in the survey most often declared fairly long experience in local government - the positions of secretaries are generally occupied by people with extensive experience in local government.

Figure 3. Secretary's length of service in local government

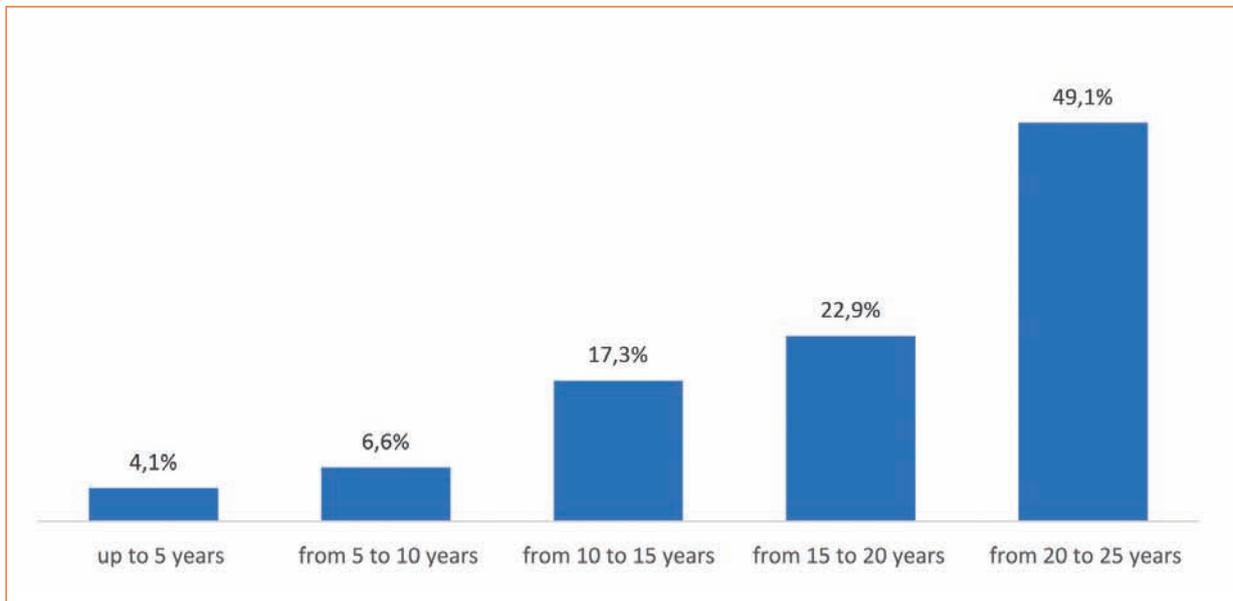
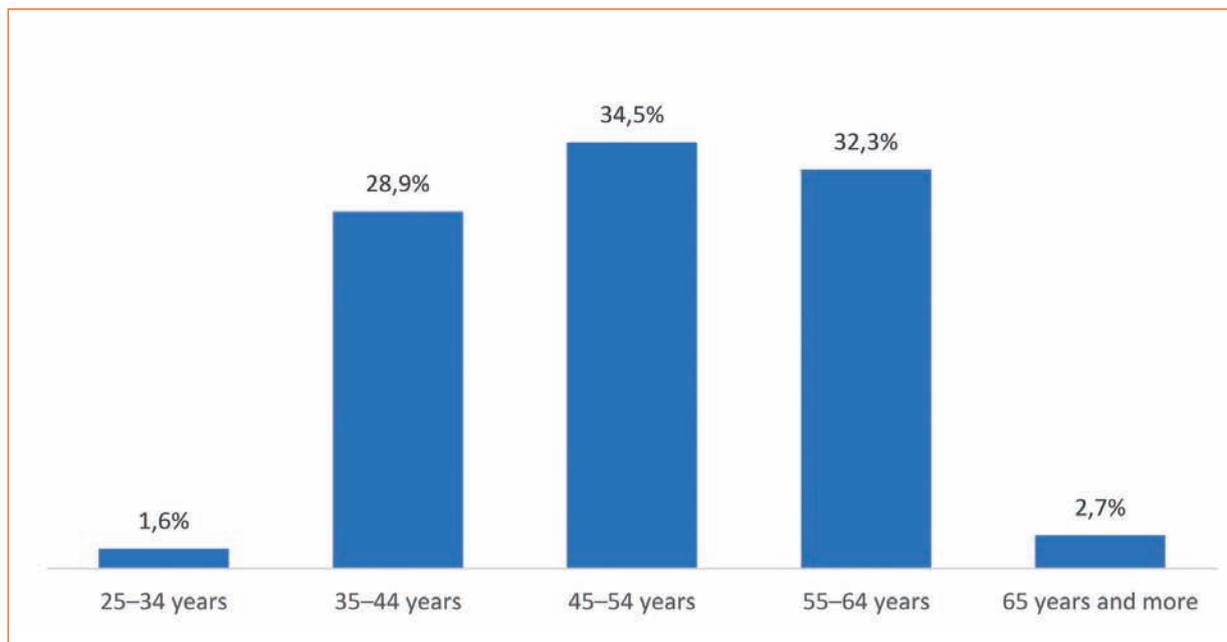


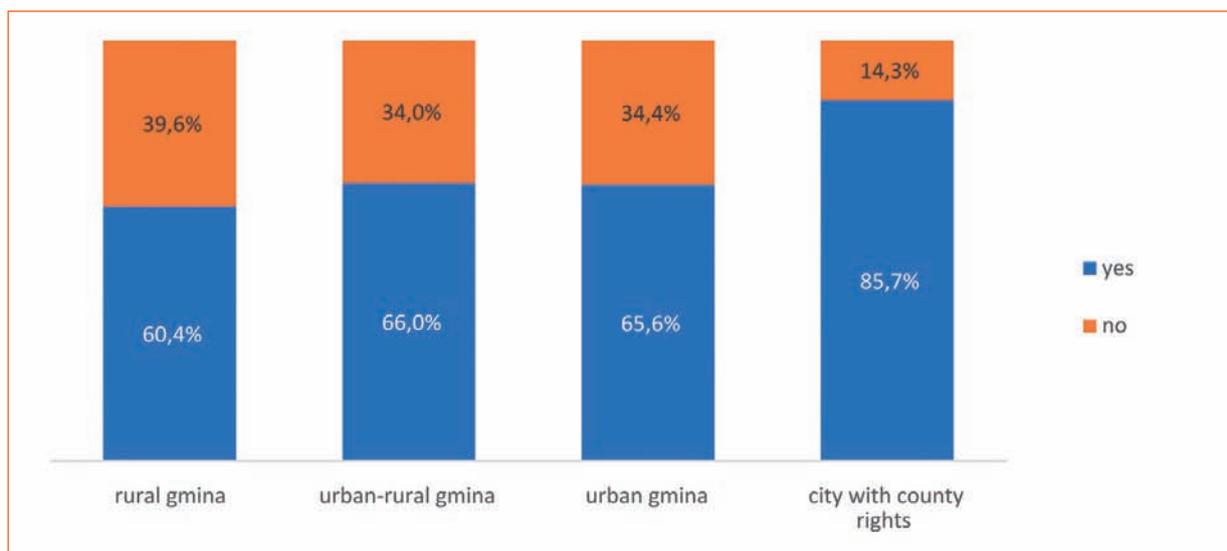
Figure 4. Age of TSU secretaries who completed the questionnaire



Long tenure also means that secretaries were most often middle-aged - only in a few local authorities were they under 35.

Nearly 63% of persons who completed the survey live in the same local government unit where they work. This is most often the case in cities with powiat rights, and relatively least often - in rural communes (*gminas*).

Figure 5. Place of work vs. place of residence of TSU secretaries



Note: Cities with county rights are also urban municipalities. They have been singled out because they are different from other urban municipalities,

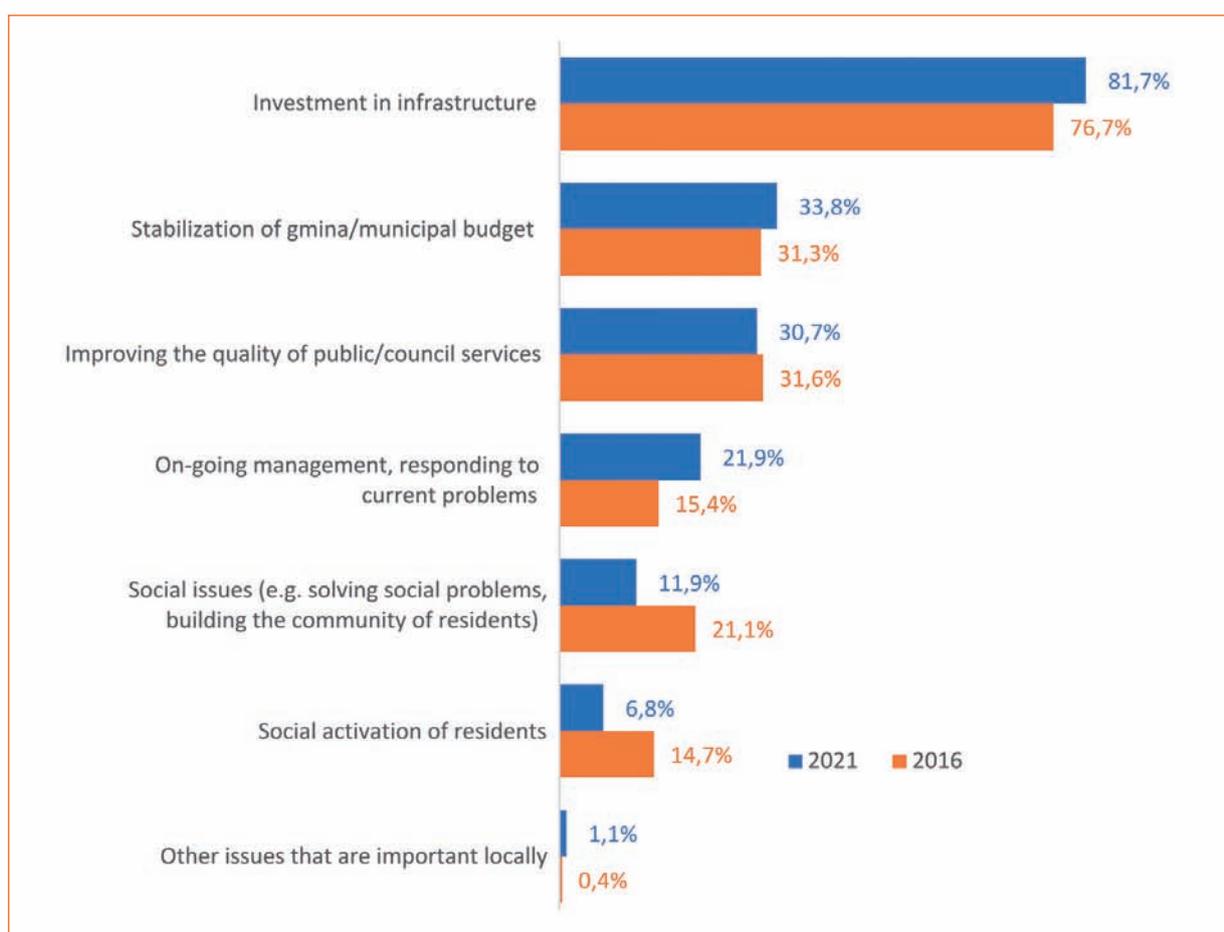
Local development priorities and difficulties in TSU management

We shall start our discussion of the situation of the self-governments under analysis with a presentation of local development priorities as seen from the point of view of territorial self-government units' secretaries. The list of these priorities will be juxtaposed with opinions about what areas of self-government functioning should be - in respondents' opinion - particularly supported by self-government authorities.

Priorities of TSU

Among the issues inquired about in the survey, infrastructure investments were by far the top development priority. They were identified as a priority by a significant majority of the surveyed TSU secretaries and this percentage has further increased since 2016.

Figure 6. Priorities of self-government authorities according to territorial self-government units' secretaries



The importance of infrastructure investment was somewhat lower in urban *gminas* than in other types of territorial self-government units, but this priority was most often indicated everywhere. Urban *gminas* were also distinguished by the frequency of indicating "Improving the quality of public/council services" as the local government's priority.

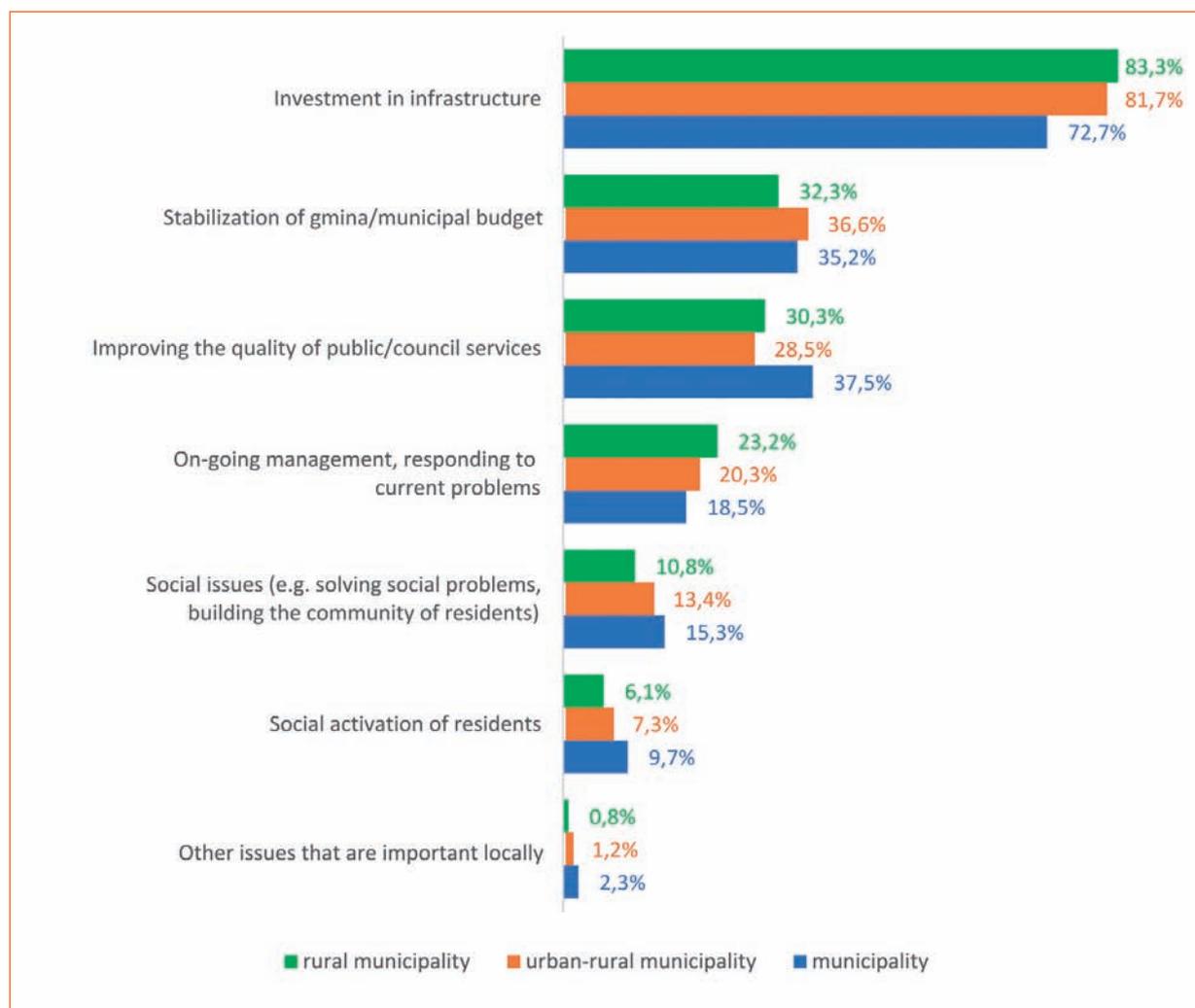
A similar situation could be observed in the previous edition of the survey (in 2016), but at that time it seemed that in urban municipalities the issue of the quality of public services was

beginning to gain importance very similar to investment. At that time, the latter was indicated by 63% of secretaries of urban municipalities, and raising the quality of services by 51%.

In a pandemic situation, however, the quality of public services began to depend not only on the actions of local governments, the most glaring example being the organisation of education. For example, local governments had no influence on whether and when the transition to distance learning and the return to full-time teaching was managed. Moreover, the pandemic affected the delivery of public services to different degrees in different types of local government units - the data clearly shows that in cities, the quality of municipal services was much more often chosen as a priority than it was in rural municipalities.

Problems with budget stabilization appeared to be important in one-third of local government units, although it is worth noting that five years earlier municipalities mentioned budget stabilization twice less often than quality of services.

Figure 7. Priorities of self-government authorities in various types of territorial self-government units



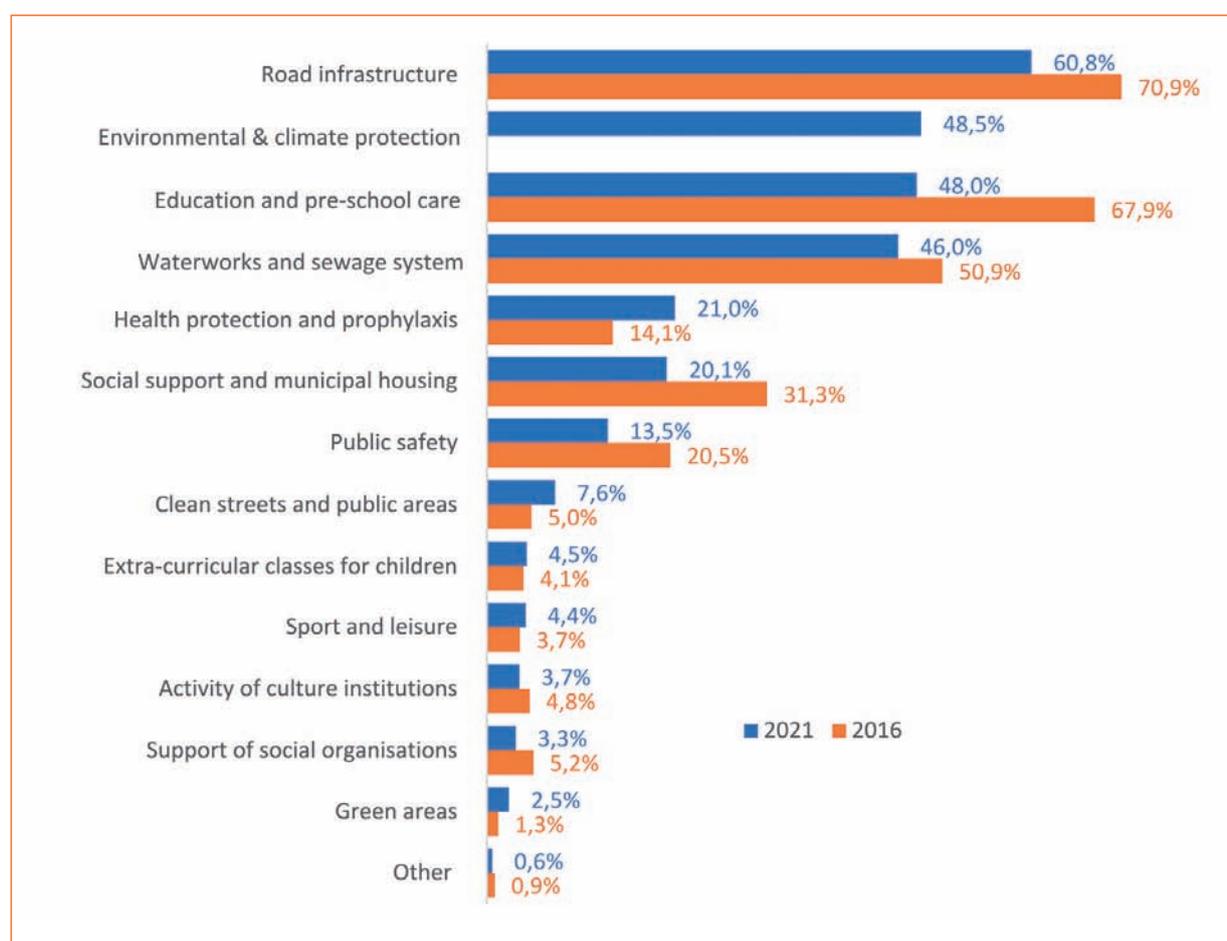
The frequency of indicating particular priorities varied to some extent geographically. It is worth paying attention first of all to "infrastructure investments" and "improving the quality of public services". The former were mentioned particularly often in Pomorskie (87%) and Łódzkie (86%), and particularly rarely in Warmińsko-Mazurskie (57%) and Wielkopolskie (65%). "Raising the quality of public services" turned out to be particularly important (particularly

frequently indicated) in Podlaskie (37%) and Śląskie (34%), and particularly rarely indicated - in Zachodniopomorskie (19%) and Kujawsko-pomorskie (22%). Nowhere, however, did the frequencies of mentioning these two priorities (investment and quality of public services) come close to each other in terms of frequency of selection by respondents as they did in urban municipalities in 2016.

The survey also included a question about what areas should be - in territorial self-government units' secretaries' opinion - particularly supported in the specific situation of the surveyed territorial self-government units. This enables one to compare opinions about what self-governments' priorities should be with the already described convictions about what these priorities actually are.

The list of desired priorities along with the frequencies of indications is shown in Figure 8. It is noteworthy that, compared to 2016, almost all areas have lost their importance (the frequency of indications has decreased). This is partly due to changes in opinion about which areas should be supported first, and partly probably due to the fact that environmental and climate protection was asked about for the first time in 2021, which proved to be very popular - nearly half of the survey participants chose this as an area requiring special support. The hierarchy of priorities asked about in the survey, however, remained unchanged.

Figure 8. Areas that should be particularly supported by local governments



In 2016, there were three groups of tasks that deserved special attention according to representatives of at least half of the surveyed local governments: road infrastructure, education and pre-school care, and water supply and sewage systems. After five years only roads remained among the tasks indicated as priorities in more than a half of the surveyed units. The remaining tasks appeared in the answers of less than a half of the secretaries who participated in the survey.

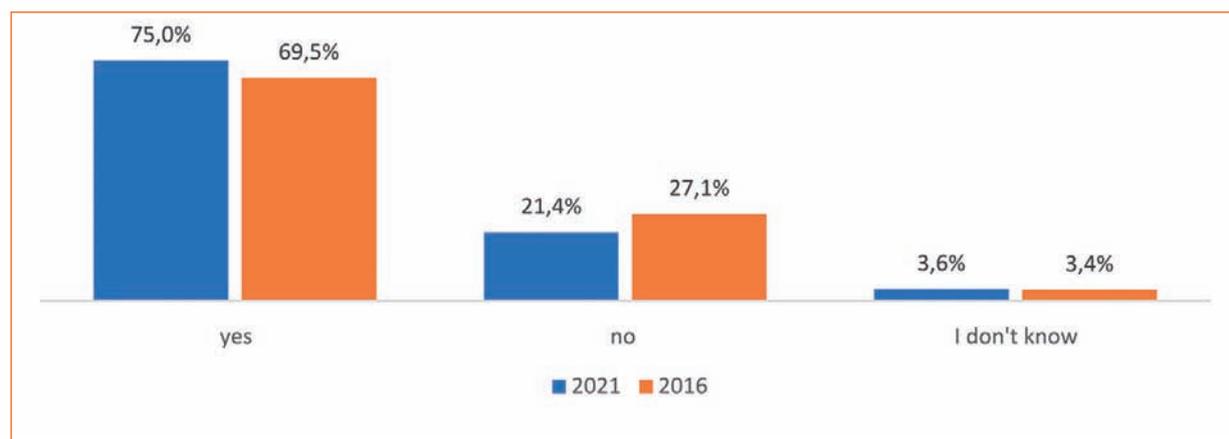
It is worth noting that two of the above-mentioned groups of tasks (roads and water supply) belonged to the category of "infrastructure investments", which, according to the vast majority of the secretaries surveyed, actually are and in 2016 were also a priority for the authorities. It is noteworthy that in the situation of a pandemic, social assistance and public safety lost their importance (were mentioned less often), while health issues were indicated slightly more often than in 2016, but it cannot be said that they were considered dominant tasks.

Strategic approach to management

When we consider the problem of self-government development priorities, the issue of strategic management comes up. The need to improve this management approach in Polish self-governments is much discussed and this need is not questioned in principle, although one may wonder, to what degree strategic management is implemented in practice. At present, a vast majority of Polish self-governments have an up-to-date development strategy (Figure 9). Many of these strategies were created with the active participation of the inhabitants, which will be discussed later. It is also worth noting that since 2016, the percentage of local governments with a strategy has significantly increased.

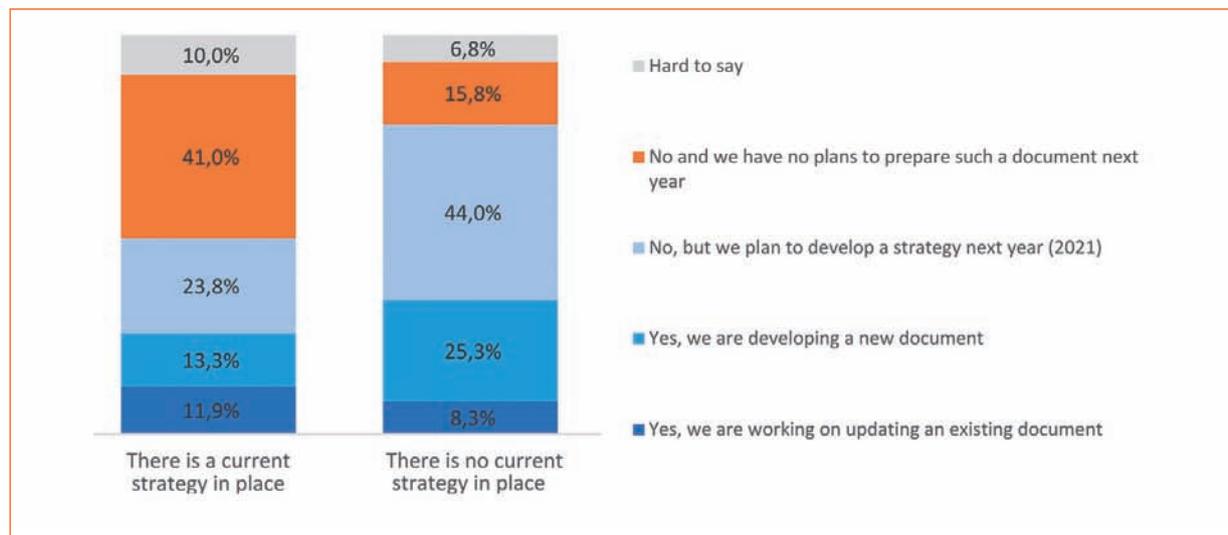
In 2021, almost one in four rural *gminas* (24%), 16% of urban *gminas* and almost one in five urban-rural *gminas* did not have a current strategy (19%).

Figure 9. Does your territorial self-government unit have an up-to-date development strategy?



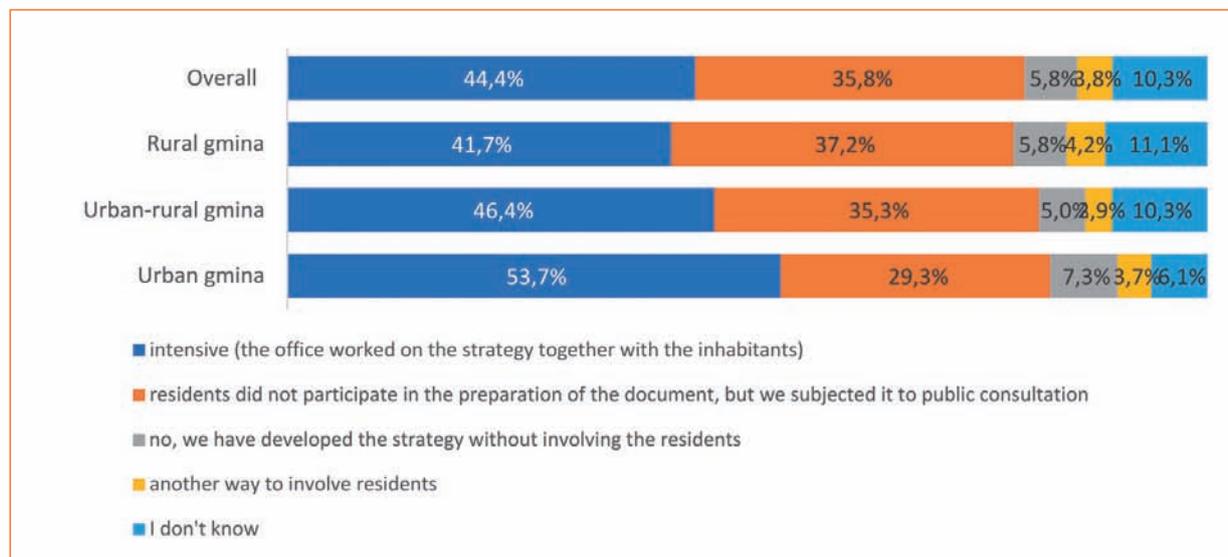
Among the units without a current development strategy, the majority are already working on it or are planning to develop such a document. However, a significant part (almost every sixth unit) does not work on a strategy and has no such plans for the nearest future.

Figure 10. Plans concerning work on strategic documents in units with and without strategies



As already mentioned, the answers of territorial self-government units secretaries indicate that a considerable part of the gmina development strategies was created with inhabitants' participation. Quite often, inviting inhabitants took the form of social consultations, i.e. it did not require their very high involvement in the process. Participatory development strategy formulation (with intensive participation of inhabitants) was more frequent in urban *gminas* than in others. At the same time, in municipal *gminas* it was relatively often the case that the strategy was prepared without the participation of inhabitants. The latter approach, however, was generally quite rare.

Figure 11. Level of residents' involvement in the work on the local development strategy by territorial self-government unit type



Compared with the situation five years ago, the share of units declaring intensive participation of their inhabitants in the works on the strategic document has decreased, and this change was significant (by 15 percentage points if we consider the whole surveyed group). On the

other hand, the share of *gminas* in which inhabitants were involved at the stage of public consultations has increased. Changes were observed in all types of local government units.

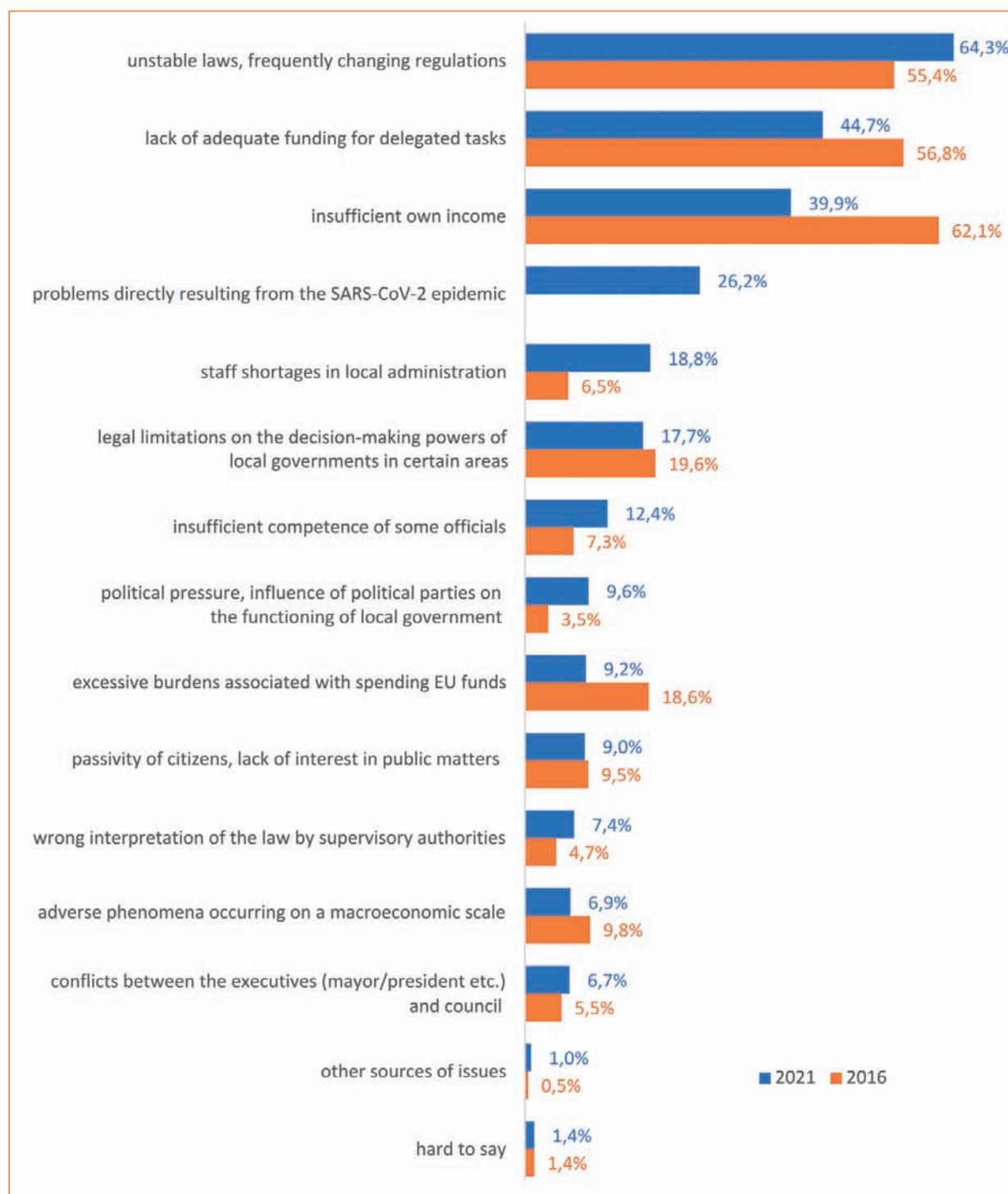
The development strategy was most often associated with the use of external support, and in the case of 48% of units this support was that an external company or consultant prepared the strategy, and 26% of the units used the support of an advisor, but the document was prepared by themselves.

It is worth pointing out that the strategies prepared by external entities were more often created with the intensive involvement of inhabitants than those developed on their own or with the partial involvement of external advisors. The situation when the strategy was created without the inhabitants' participation occurred most often in the case when the unit did not benefit from any form of external support. This may be connected with the fact that the participatory strategy process is time-consuming and requires considerable commitment not only on the part of the participating inhabitants, but also on the part of the organisers. If it is carried out by an external company, the office employees are not directly burdened with organisational work, so it is easier to carry out the entire process. In situations where they are working on the strategy on their own, they may no longer have the space to involve the inhabitants, as the development of the strategic document does not invalidate other tasks of the office staff.

Sources of difficulties in local governance

The day-to-day management of a territorial self-government unit is associated with various problems and difficulties. The surveyed TSU secretaries were asked to indicate the sources of greatest difficulties in managing their self-government unit. A similar question had been asked five years earlier. The changes that took place in the hierarchy of indicated sources in the period between the two surveys were very interesting (Fig. 12).

Figure 12. Hierarchy of sources of problems in local governance from the perspective of TSU secretaries



In 2016, there were as many as three sources of problems that were mentioned most frequently: insufficient own income, lack of adequate financing of commissioned tasks and instability of legal regulations. At the same time, the difference between the percentages of indications of these categories was small - not exceeding 7 percentage points. In 2021, instability of legal regulations was "promoted" to the first place in terms of frequency of recalling, while the next most frequent problem, related to inadequate financing of commissioned tasks, appeared in the responses of secretaries 12 percentage points less frequently.

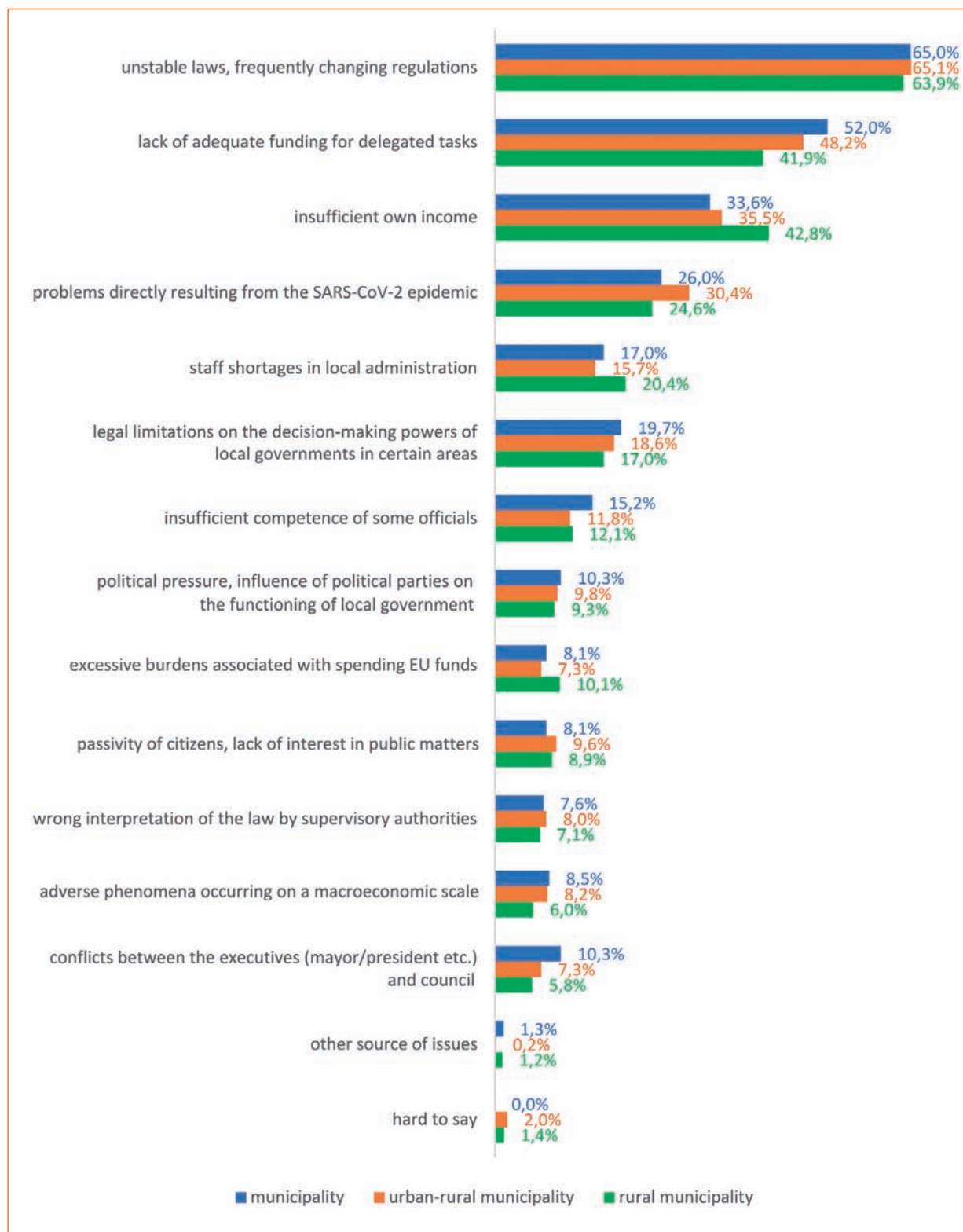
The problems which bothered local governments more often in the recent survey than 5 years earlier included (apart from the aforementioned instability of the law): staff shortages in local administration, insufficient competences of some officials, political pressures and incorrect interpretation of the law by supervisory bodies. On the other hand, problems with spending of EU funds were indicated much less frequently.

It is worth noting that issues related to political pressure and the interpretation of the law by supervisory authorities were mentioned sporadically in 2016, while in 2021 the frequency of their mention almost tripled - although they were still problems mentioned rather rarely.

Problems directly resulting from the SARS-CoV2 epidemic were identified by one in four secretaries surveyed. The issue of the impact of the epidemic on the operation of local government was investigated in detail and is discussed in a separate report.

The spheres of local government activities which caused management problems were not clearly differentiated with respect to the type of unit - they were similar in rural and urban *gminas*. Rural struggled with insufficient own revenues and staff shortages in administration somewhat more often than others, while in cities inadequate financing of commissioned tasks and conflicts between the executive power and the council were indicated more often. The latter category of problems was indicated by one in ten municipalities, 6% by rural *gminas* and 7% by urban-rural .

Figure 13. Hierarchy of sources of problems in local governance in particular types of territorial self-government units from the viewpoint of secretaries

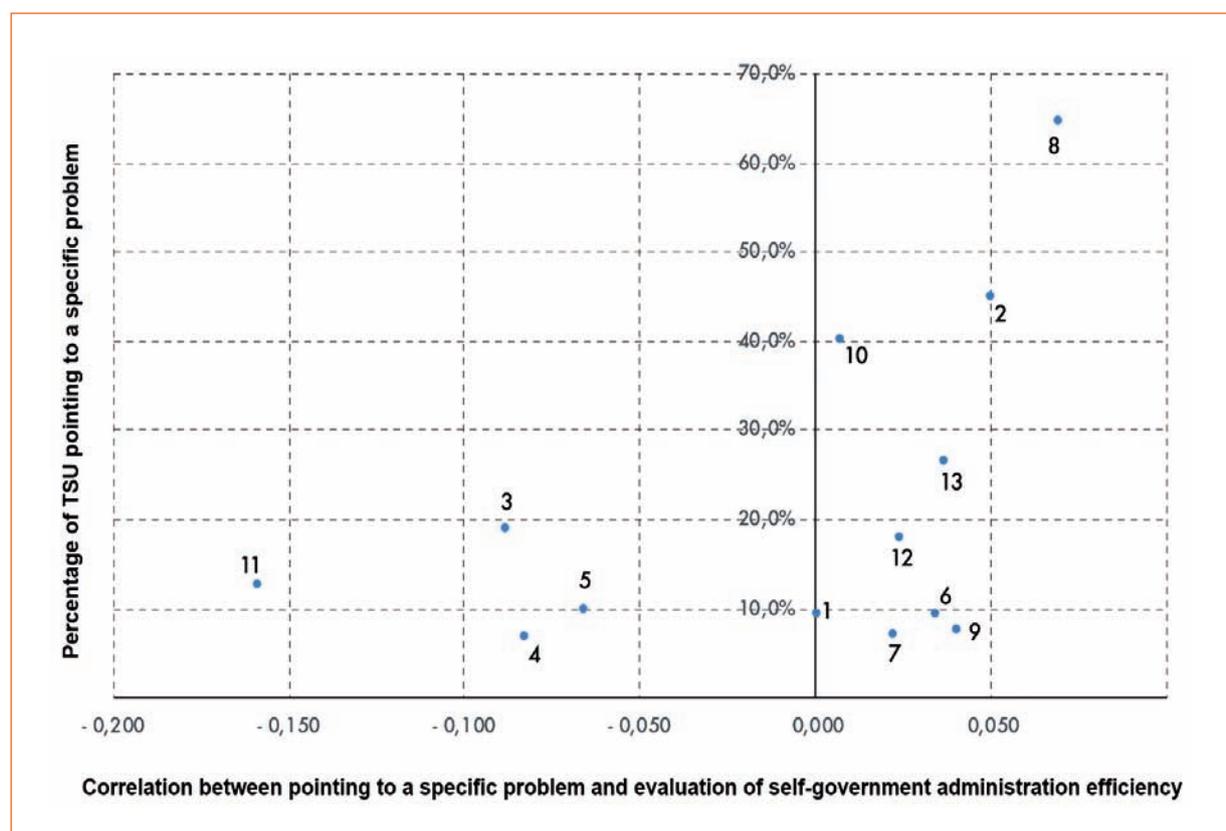


The sources of territorial self-government units management problems indicated by the secretaries were analysed in terms of their relationship with the general evaluation of the performance of the unit. Four types of problems were found to be associated with low

assessments of the performance of the local government. These were: staff shortages in local administration, insufficient competence of some officials, political pressures on self-government functioning and conflicts between the executive power and the council. But all these problems were indicated relatively rarely (especially the last one).

When interpreting positive values of correlation coefficients between the assessment of office efficiency and identification of certain problems, it is particularly worth remembering that correlation means co-occurrence of the examined phenomena, and not a cause-effect relation between them. For example, a positive correlation between assessment of office efficiency and identification of instability of legal regulations as a source of management problems means that this problem bothers offices assessed as efficient more often. Here the relationship is strongest. Efficient offices also tend to perceive the lack of adequate financing of commissioned tasks as a problem hindering the management of the local government unit more often than others. The remaining positive correlations were very weak (below 0.05).

Figure 14: The relationship between the frequency of indicating particular sources of management difficulties and the office's efficiency rating



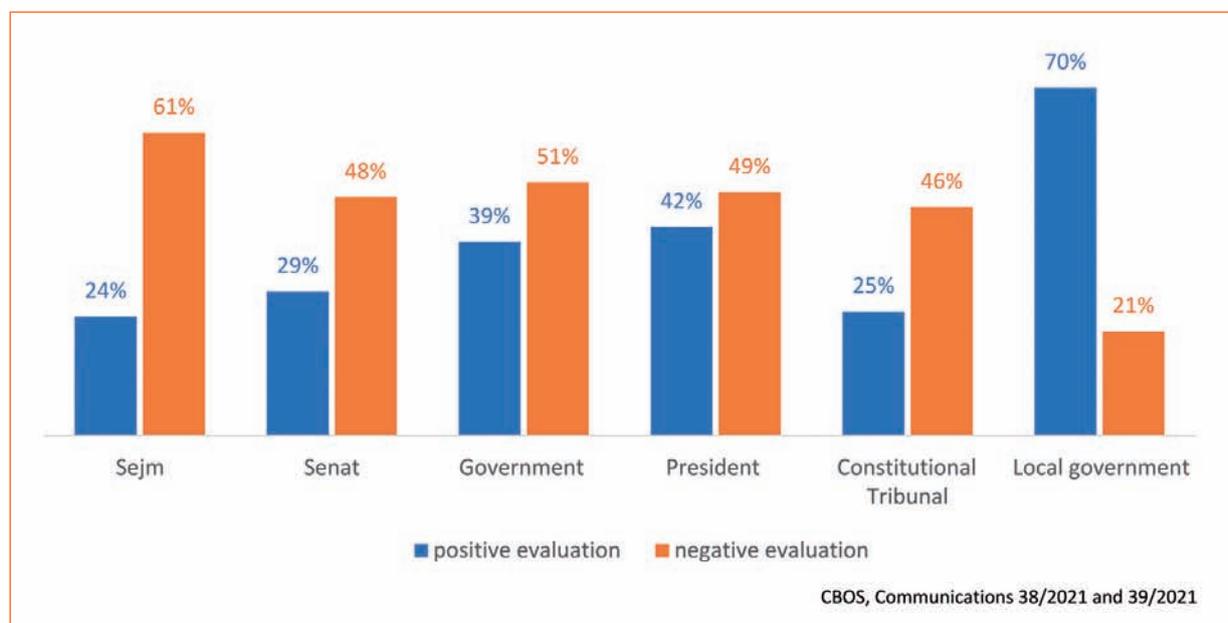
- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. passivity of citizens, lack of interest in public affairs 2. lack of adequate funding for commissioned tasks 3. staff shortages in the local administration 4. conflicts between the executive authority in local government (mayor) and the council 5. political pressure, the influence of political parties on the functioning of local government 6. excessive burden related to the spending of EU funds 7. adverse macroeconomic developments | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. instability of laws, changing regulations 9. incorrect interpretation of the law by supervisory authorities 10. insufficient own revenue 11. insufficient competence of some officials 12. legal limitations of local government decision-making in certain areas 13. Problems directly resulting from the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic |
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Evaluation of self-government efficiency and its determinants

For years, local governments have been one of the very few public institutions (and probably the only one directly related to the exercise of power) which are positively evaluated by citizens. For example, in March 2021, 70% of CBOS respondents positively assessed the activities of local governments, and only one in five (21%) negatively. The central government, on the other hand, has for years received more positive assessments than negative ones.

The chart below (Fig. 15) presents the assessment of the activities of selected public institutions in March 2021, but it is worth remembering that in the entire period 1997-2021, for which CBOS publishes data, not once did the percentage of negative assessments of the activities of local authorities outweigh the positive ones.

Figure 15. Citizens' evaluations of the performance of local governments compared to evaluations of the performance of other public institutions in March 2021.



Consequently, citizens are generally satisfied with the performance of self-government authorities and this situation has lasted for a long time. The survey discussed in this report allows us to look at the activities of self-governments in more detail and find out what factors have a positive and negative impact on the efficiency and organisation of self-governments' work.

Overall assessment of the performance of the authorities

Answers to the survey questions showed that secretaries of territorial self-government units rated the efficiency of their offices very high: nearly a half of them (49%) said that the self-government administration worked very efficiently (the sum of the percentages of the two highest marks on the 9-point scale), while low marks (below 4) were given by only a few persons. This is illustrated in Figure 16.

It is also worth noting that the evaluation of efficiency has improved since the previous survey, which was conducted five years earlier (in 2016), although even then it was generally high. All this shows that local government officials work in a fairly friendly environment - their work is positively perceived by citizens and they themselves are also convinced that they do it well.

Figure 16. Overall assessment of the efficiency of local government administration (2016 and 2021)

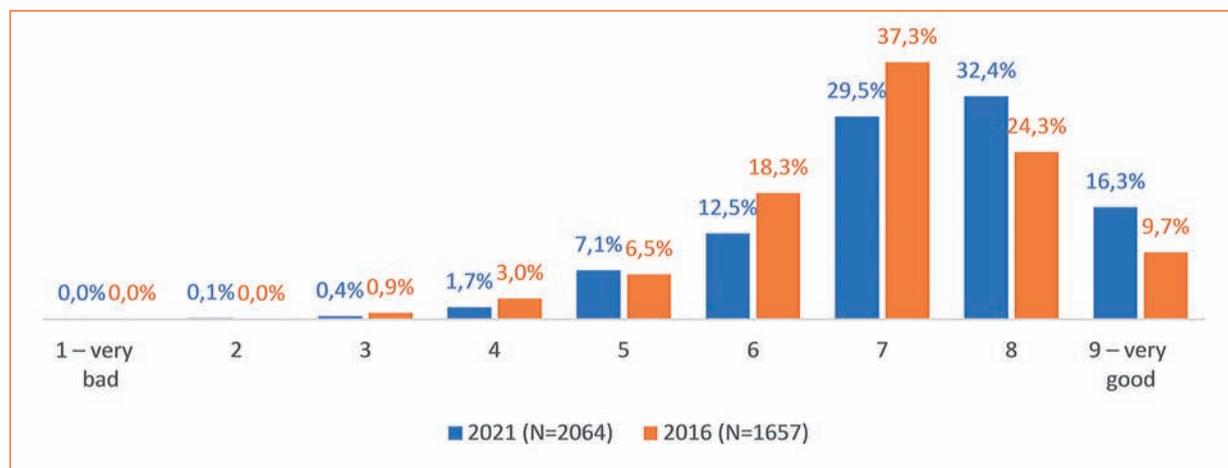


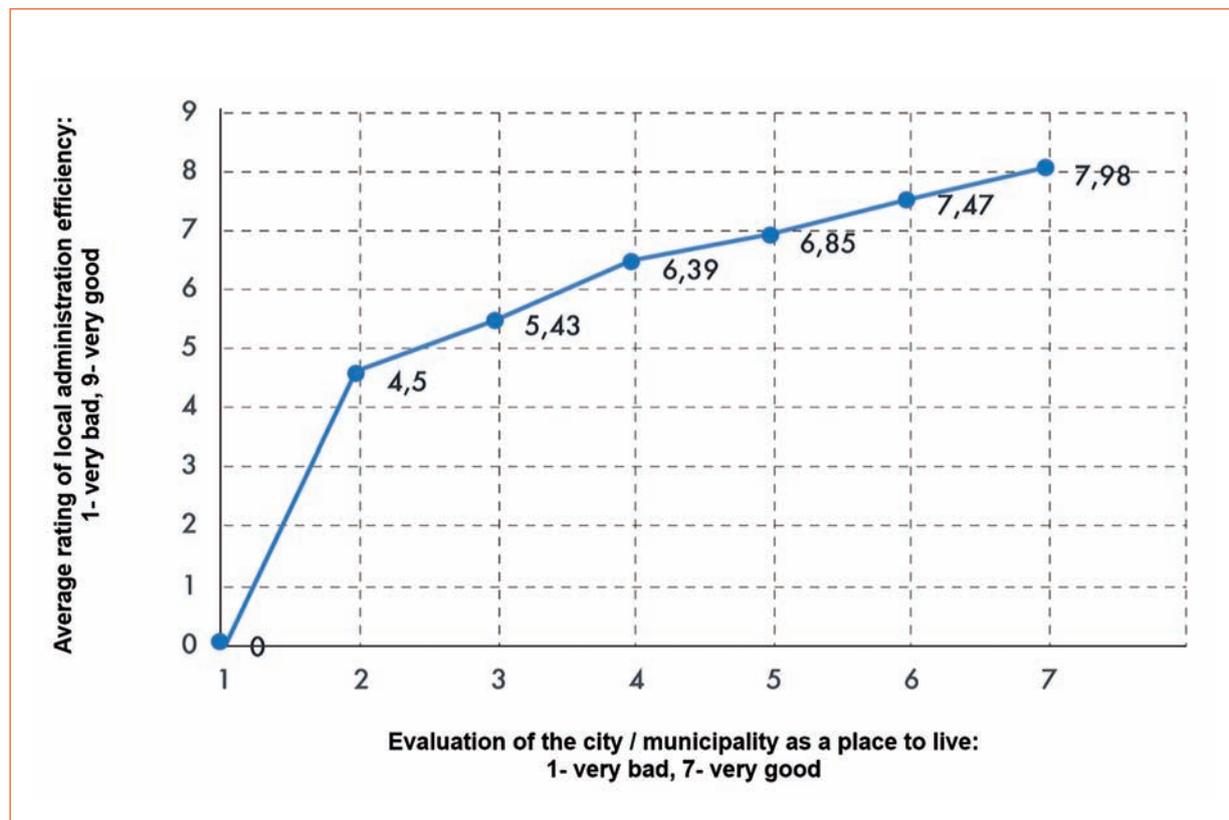
Figure 17. Overall rating of the city / municipality as a place to live (2016 and 2021)



Evaluation of the efficiency of the administration is correlated with evaluation of the city or gmina as a place to live, which is manifested not only in the very similar shape of both distributions. In units which the surveyed secretaries considered as a good place to live, the efficiency of the administration received on average higher marks than in units considered as a worse place (the correlation coefficient between the two grades was 0.44). One may conclude that from the surveyed self-government officials' point of view, efficiency of administration is a very important element supporting the high quality of life of inhabitants.

It is also worth noting that in the period separating the two surveys the percentages giving the highest ratings to both the efficiency of the office and the percentages of secretaries considering their municipality a good place to live increased.

Figure 18. Average ratings for administrative efficiency depending on the evaluation of the town/city as a place to live

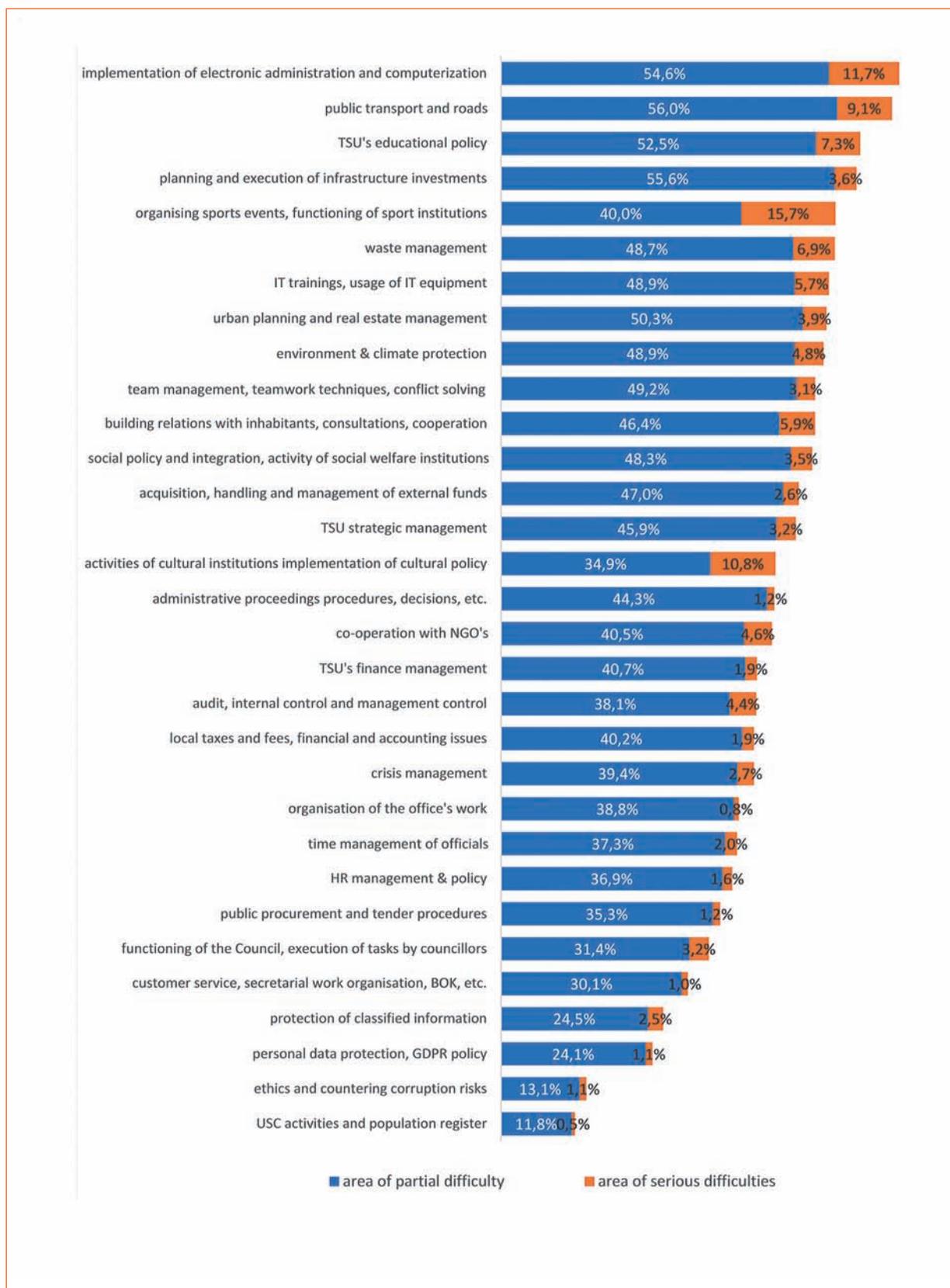


Irrespective of high ratings, local administrations face a number of problems in performing the tasks set before them. The surveyed secretaries were given a list of tasks performed by local government institutions and asked to indicate, which of them are performed without major disturbances and which encounter various types of difficulties (serious or partial). The distribution of answers to this question is presented in Figure 18.

Two-thirds of the units surveyed reported no task that posed a serious difficulty, which means that one-third did. Usually, one task was indicated as a serious problem, but there were units which had to cope with many problems. Only in 73 *gminas* secretaries declared that all the tasks asked about in the survey were executed on a current basis and without any serious disturbances. The fewest problem areas were indicated in urban *gminas*, but the variation in their number by *gmina* type was generally small.

Serious difficulties most frequently appeared in the organization of sports events and the activities of sports and recreation institutions (15% of indications of serious difficulties in performing these tasks). Most probably, the pandemic which made it impossible to organise mass events, and sports events usually fall into this category, was not without significance here. It is possible that for the same reason also "activities of cultural institutions" relatively often appeared among the areas facing serious difficulties. The pandemic also contributed - as one can guess - to a slightly more frequent indication of the educational policy of TSU as a problem area than 5 years earlier. In 2016, educational policy was indicated by 57% of TSUs, and in 2021 - by 60%.

Figure 19. Problematic (very and partially) areas of task performance by self-government offices according to territorial self-government units' secretaries



The two tasks most often indicated as problematic - "implementation of electronic administration and computerization of the office" and "public transport and roads" - have remained in first place since the previous survey. However, it is worth noting that in 2016, electronic administration posed problems for 77% of TSUs, including one in three units indicating it as an area of serious difficulty, while five years later, IT problems were reported by 66% of units, of which 11% considered these problems serious. Thus, it seems that the process of solving IT problems is progressing, although the problems are still significant.

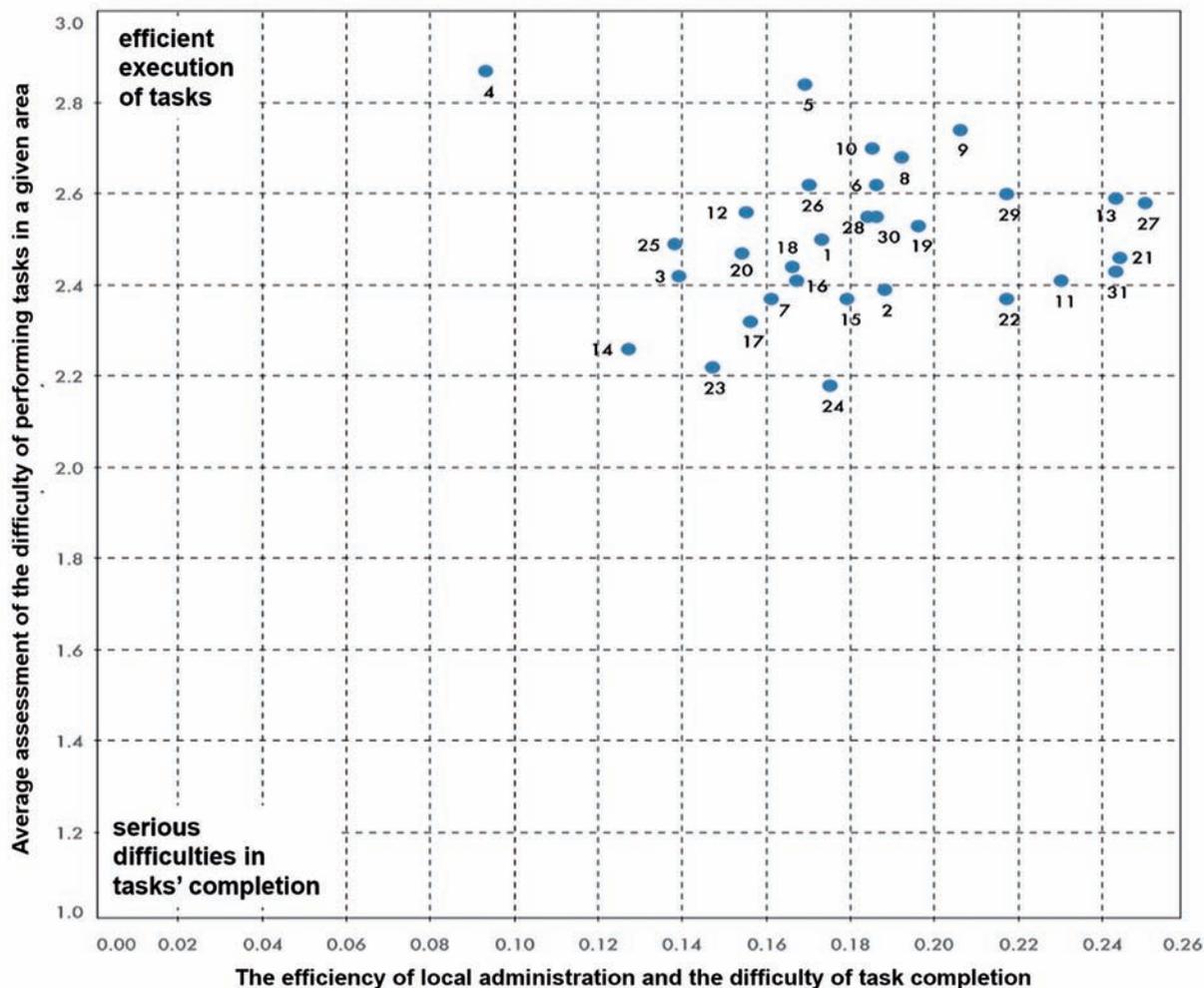
The least problematic areas (least frequently indicated as such) are and were civil registration and anti-corruption.

The number of tasks identified by secretaries as causing implementation problems is correlated with their assessment of the efficiency of local administration (the correlation coefficient is -0.203 for the number of tasks with serious difficulties and slightly higher, -0.237, for the number of tasks with partial difficulties). The coefficient is negative, which means that the more problematic the tasks, the lower the rating of the efficiency of the office.

In the chart below (Figure 20), we present the correlation between the efficiency of individual tasks and the overall assessment of the efficiency of administration¹. This analysis shows that problems in the performance of individual tasks are of varying importance to the overall assessment of administrative efficiency. Tasks related to office work organisation, time management and co-operation between officials, as well as strategic management of TSU proved to be the most important.

¹ Due to the ordinal nature of the variables measuring the degree of difficulty in completing each task, Spearman's correlation coefficient was used.

Figure 20: Relevance of factors in the assessment of local administration efficiency

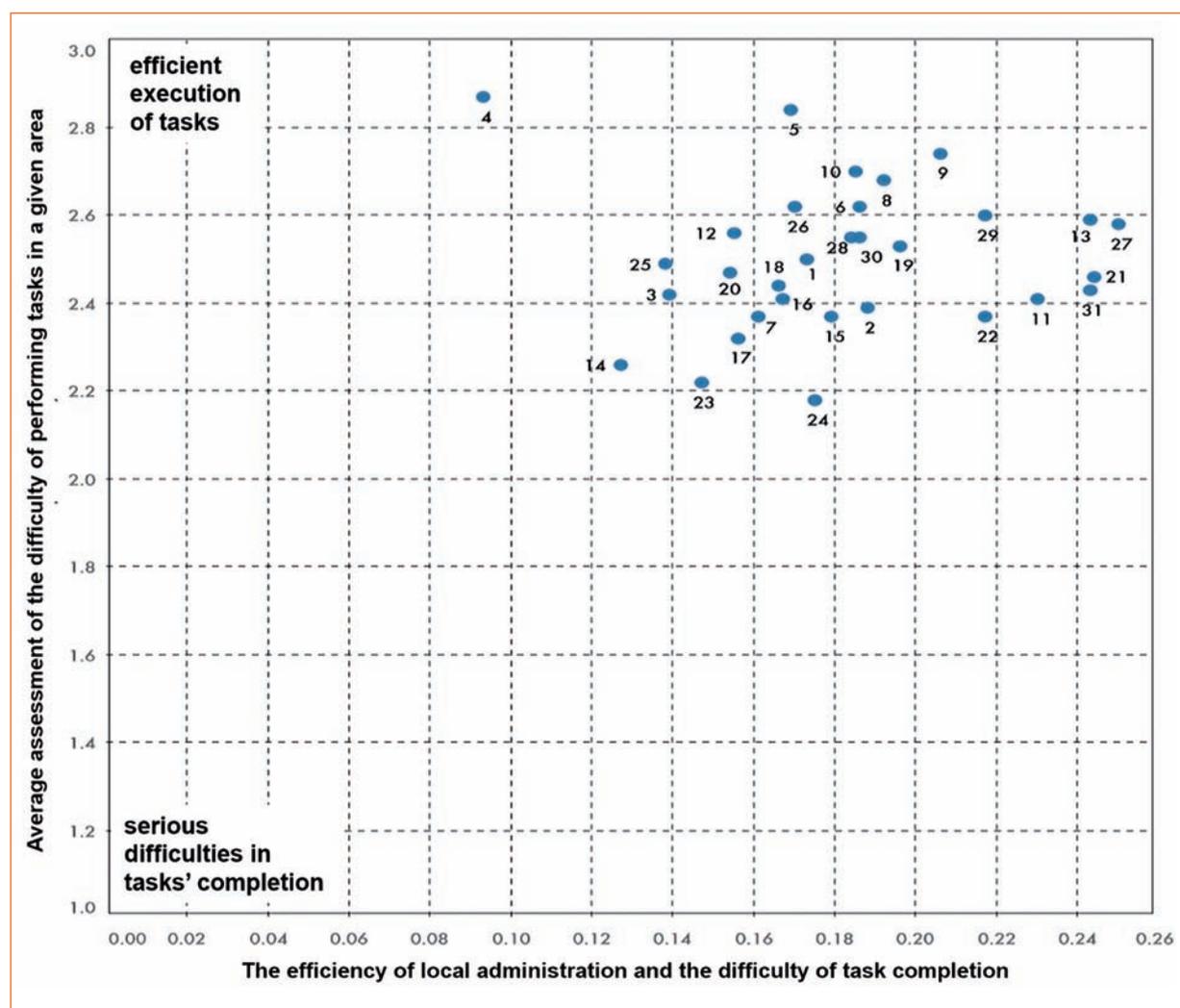


- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. audit, internal control and management control 2. building relationships with residents public consultations, cooperation, etc. 3. activities of cultural institutions implementation of cultural policy 4. the activities of the registry office and population register 5. ethics and countering corruption risks 6. the functioning of the Council, carrying out the tasks by the councillors 7. waste management 8. providing customer service to the office, organising the work of the secretariat, BOK, etc. 9. personal data protection, RODO policy 10. protection of classified information 11. environmental protection, climate protection 12. local fees and taxes, financial and accounting issues 13. organisation of the work of the office 14. organisation of sport events activities of sport and recreation institutions 15. planning and execution of infrastructure investments | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. town planning and real estate management 17. education policy of territorial self-government units 18. social policy social integration, activity of social assistance institutions 19. administrative procedures, decisions, etc. 20. acquisition, handling and management of external funds 21. strategic management of territorial self-government units 22. IT computer training, use of IT tools 23. public transport and roads 24. implementation of electronic administration and computerization of the office 25. cooperation with non-governmental organizations 26. public procurement and tendering procedures 27. management of officials' working time 28. financial management of TSU 29. personnel management, human resources policy 30. crisis management 31. human team management teamwork techniques, conflict resolution, etc. |
|--|---|

For analytical purposes, the tasks of self-governments listed in the questionnaire were divided into 7 types, in the same way as it was done in the "Effective Self-Government Office" report²: (1) management, office functioning, administration activities, (2) tendering, issuing decisions, servicing inhabitants, (3) cultural policy, sport and recreation, (4) implementation of key public services, (5) implementation of other tasks, (6) cooperation with inhabitants, (7) shaping local development.

The comparison of the aggregated types of tasks with the assessment of self-government administration performance confirmed the conclusions presented earlier - the tasks in the area of office management and administration activity are of most importance for the level of marks given by territorial self-government units secretaries to the efficiency of self-government activities. Assessment of the quality of services provided to inhabitants is also quite significant. Evaluation of the quality of performance of tasks in the area of cultural policy, sport and recreation turned out to have the smallest impact on the overall assessment of the efficiency of the local government (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Importance of problems in different areas of local government for the assessment of its efficiency



² Effective local government office. Development of staff competences as an element of building efficient local administration. Report prepared by Cezary Trutkowski. FRDL: Warsaw 2016 (<https://frdl.org.pl/badania-ianalizy/raporty-i-inne/skuteczny-urzad-samorzadowy-raport>). As the author points out, "the categorisation was based on the analysis of the implementation of public policies conducted in various research projects. To some extent, it is obviously arbitrary in nature". The method of categorization can be found in the Appendix at the end of this paper.

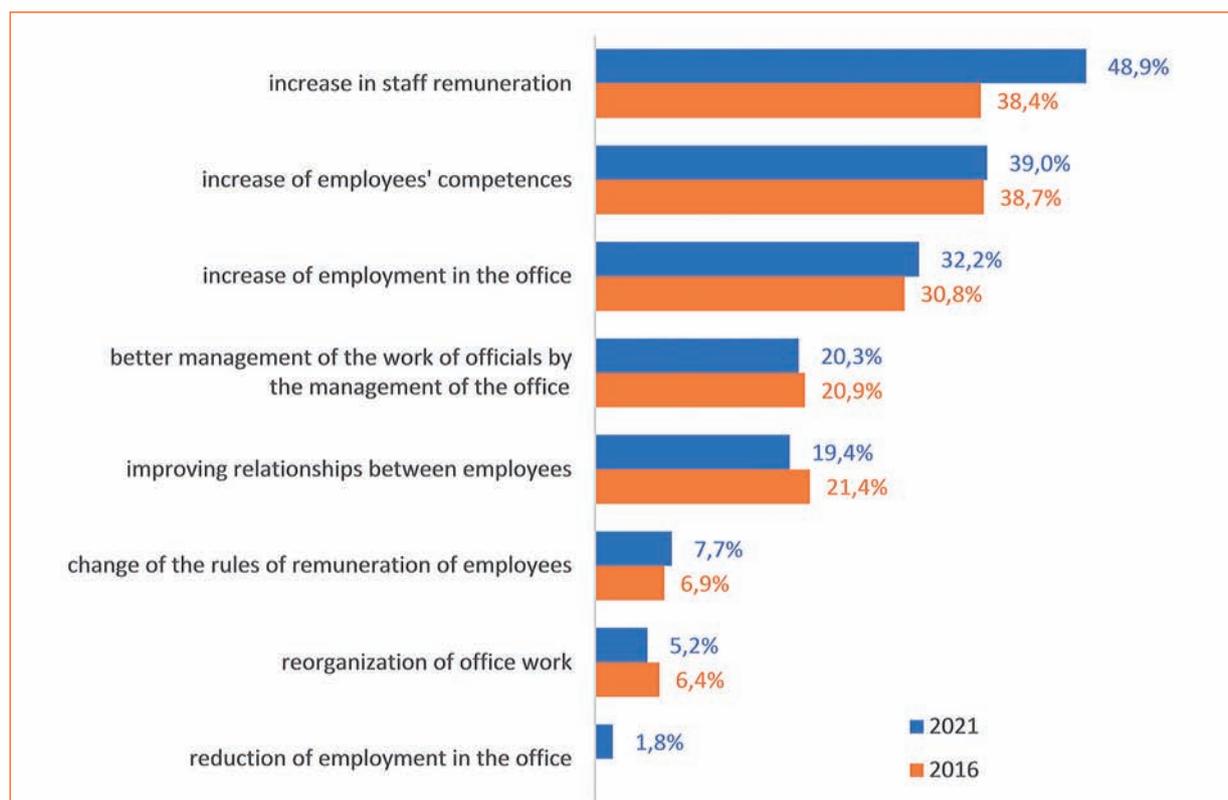
Opportunities to improve the quality of the office's work

The secretaries surveyed were also asked to identify actions that they felt would improve the operations of their office. The survey suggested a list of various actions, with the option to add their own. These were: increasing staff competence, reorganising the work of the office, increasing staffing in the office, increasing staff remuneration, better management of the work of officials by the office management, reducing staffing in the office, changing staff remuneration rules and improving staff relations.

Increasing the remuneration of officials and increasing their competence were indicated most frequently. Every third local government stated that employment should be increased. The issue of relations between employees is also worth mentioning. This issue did not appear at the beginning of the list of desirable activities, however, in every fifth local government office these relations were indicated as one of the most important factors conditioning efficient work.

The same actions appeared at the beginning of the list 5 years earlier, but in 2021 increasing salaries was indicated significantly more often than in the previous survey, while the frequency of indications of other actions did not change significantly.

Figure 22. Ways of improving office work in the opinion of territorial self-government units' secretaries

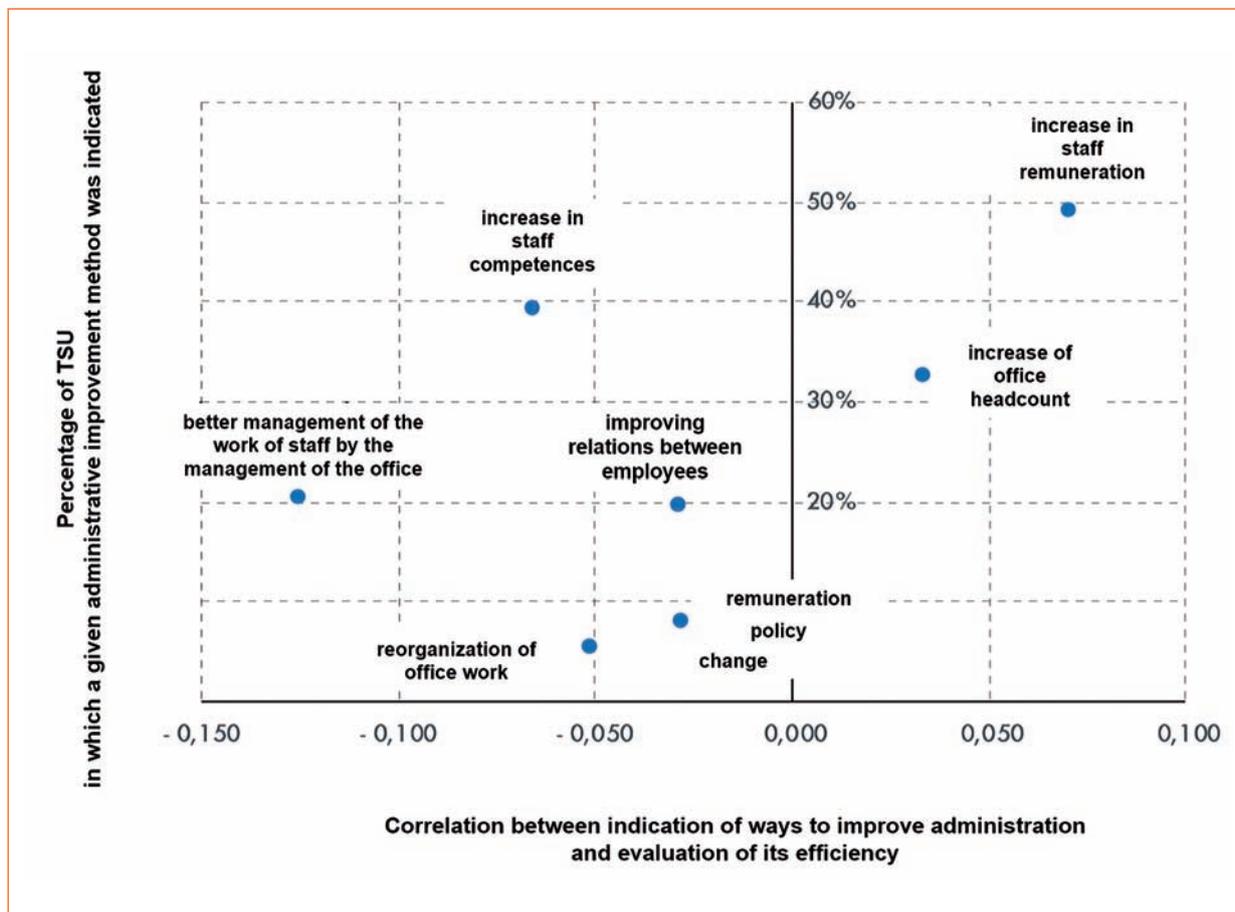


An increase in remuneration and improvement of competences were the most frequently indicated desirable factors for improvement of performance of an office in all types of local government units. In cities, the need for better management of officials by the management was also noticed (25% of indications among urban *gminas*), whereas the need to increase employment appeared much less frequently than in other types of units (16% in urban *gminas*, 37% in rural *gminas* and 27% in urban-rural *gminas*).

An analysis of correlations between indicating particular factors which could improve the office and the assessment of its efficiency was also conducted. Most of the correlations turned out to be negative, which is consistent with intuition - if we believe that some area of the office's activity needs improvement, it means that we have comments regarding its efficiency (implicitly: we lower the rating). Two types of actions aimed at improvement of the office were positively correlated with the assessment of its efficiency: increasing remuneration and increasing employment. Here again it should be recalled that correlation does not indicate a cause-and-effect relationship, but rather the co-occurrence of phenomena (opinions). Therefore, the need to increase employment and salaries was perceived more often in efficient offices than in those rated lower in terms of efficiency. However, these correlations were weak.

The negative correlations were stronger, showing that in the lower rated offices the need to improve the management of officials' work and to raise their competence was perceived. The remaining correlations were weak.

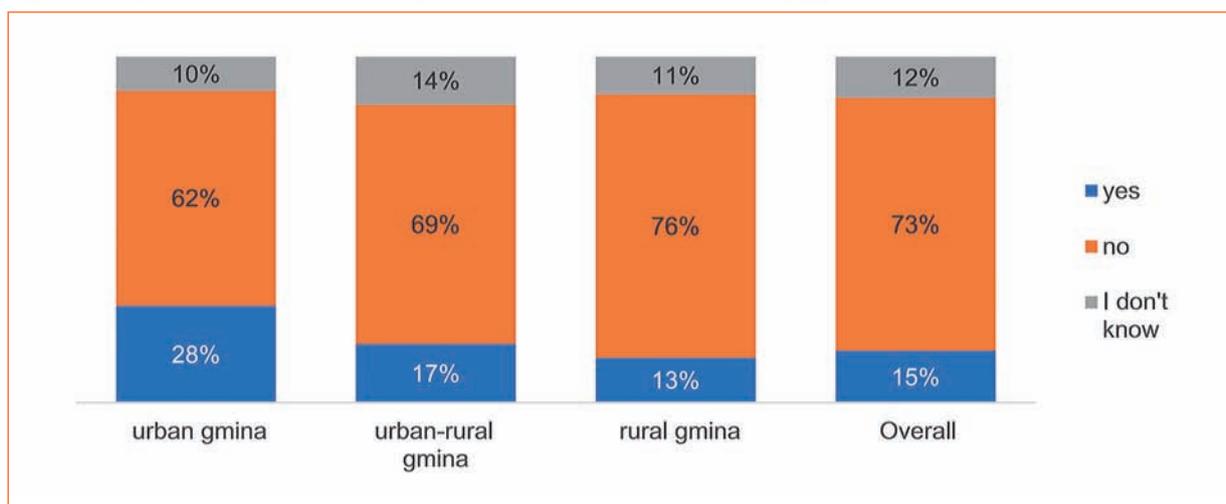
Figure 23: Factors that could improve the efficiency of the office



Monitoring the quality of the office's work

According to the declarations of secretaries, during the last two years, 15% of the offices surveyed had conducted a self-evaluation using a formalized tool. The highest number of declarations of conducting such self-evaluation were made in municipalities.

Figure 24. Self-assessment with the use of the formalised tool - by territorial self-government unit type



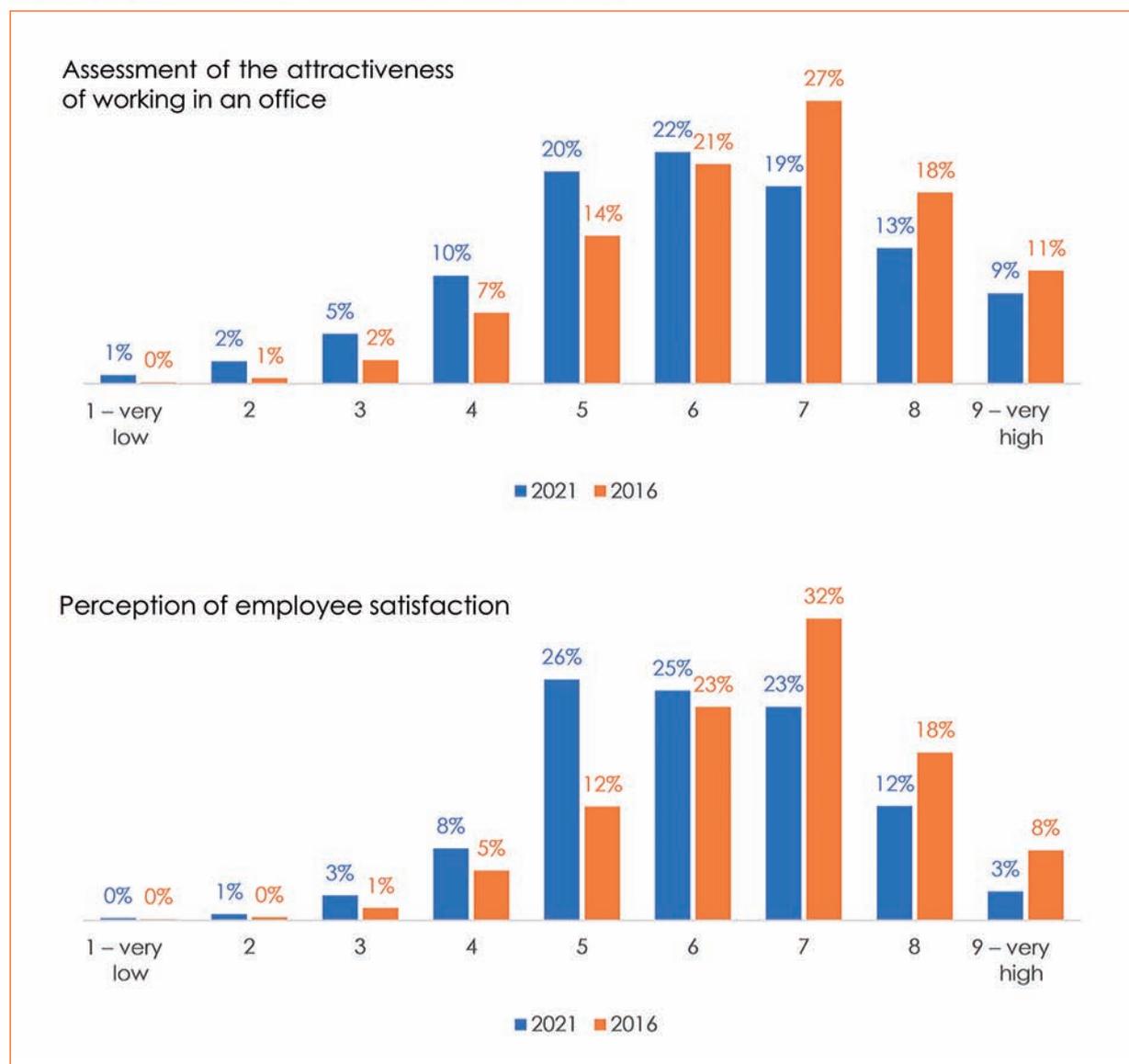
In response to the open question concerning the type of self-control tool used, various forms of questionnaires were mentioned (e.g. customer surveys, employee surveys or surveys carried out as part of preparation of the *gmina* development strategy). The CAF system was mentioned over a dozen times and sometimes the information that the self-evaluation had been conducted "in accordance with the regulations" was added.

The way the answers to the open-ended question were phrased indicates that the issue of formalized self-assessment is not well known to most secretaries and under this term "formalized self-assessment tool" they understood very different things.

The office as a workplace

From the perspective of local government unit secretaries, working in an office seems quite attractive compared to other opportunities offered by the labour market - 62% chose ratings on the right ("positive") side of the scale, and only 18% on the negative side.

Figure 25. Evaluation of the attractiveness of working in a local government office and evaluation of job satisfaction with the office's employees made by TSU secretaries in 2021 and in 2016



The comparison of the general assessment of attractiveness of work in the local government with the opinions expressed by the same persons about whether work in the given office brings satisfaction to the officials employed there, shows a strong correlation between these assessments. The correlation coefficient is indeed high at 0.67. The average ratings are almost identical - 6.03 for attractiveness and 6.04 for job satisfaction. Opinions as to the level of employees' satisfaction with work in the office were not differentiated with regard to the type of self-government unit, whereas the ratings of the attractiveness of the local government office as a workplace showed some differences. In urban *gminas*, the average assessment of attractiveness of this workplace was higher than in other *gminas* (6.17 as compared with 6.01).

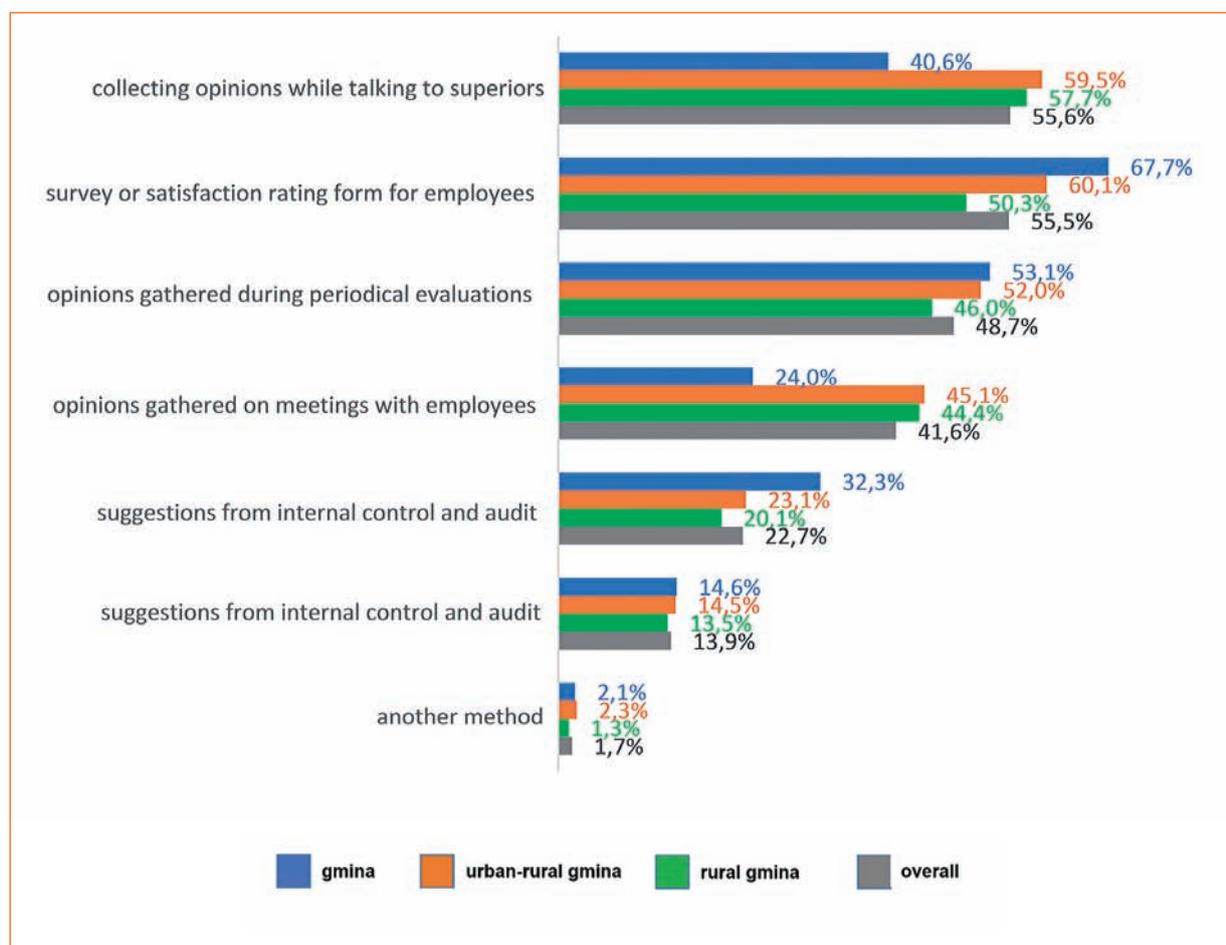
Compared to five years ago, both the rating of the attractiveness of working in a local government office (the average rating then was 6.58 and dropped to 6.03) and the perception of the level of satisfaction of officials (6.62 in 2016 and 6.04 - in 2021) decreased slightly. In contrast, it turned out that secretaries rated employee satisfaction more highly in 2021 than in 2016 through the lens of their own perception that working in the office was attractive. The strength of correlation of these two ratings in 2016 was 0.57, and in 2021 - 0.67. Both coefficients are large, but the difference between them in favour of 2021 - very clear.

In general, in offices evaluated as efficient, one could more often encounter opinions that officials are satisfied with their work, as well as that the office is an attractive place to work. The correlation coefficients between the aforementioned opinions and the assessment of the efficiency of an office amounted to 0.31 and 0.25 respectively. It is also worth adding that work in the local government was more often considered attractive in communes which were assessed as a good place to live (correlation 0.27).

Employee satisfaction surveys were conducted in every third office (35%), of which only 6% did it regularly. It turned out that the average assessment of the level of staff satisfaction is slightly higher in those offices where this satisfaction is surveyed (regularly or irregularly) than in those where no surveys are carried out. It should be remembered, however, that we are referring here to the secretaries' opinions about the level of satisfaction of the office's employees, and not to the statements of the employees themselves. It is therefore a mediated measure.

In local self-governments which took part in the survey different methods of satisfaction

Figure 26. Methods of researching satisfaction of office employees



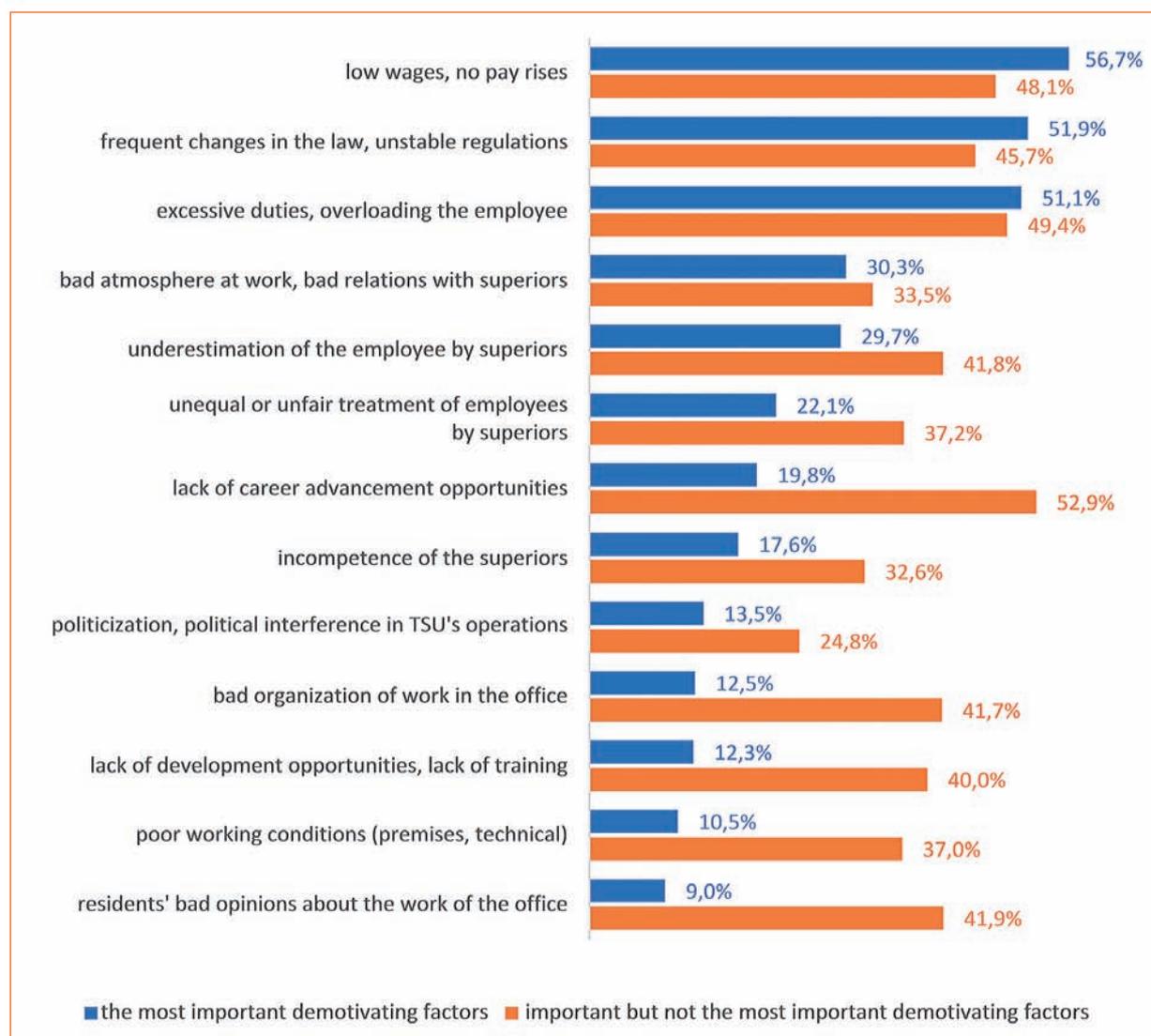
survey were used. Most often these were questionnaires or opinions collected on the occasion of periodical evaluations or interviews with superiors. In cities, formalised tools were used more frequently - secretaries from 2/3 of municipalities indicated questionnaires or appraisal sheets, more than a half of them mentioned opinions gathered during periodical evaluations. In smaller units, the most common way of researching employee satisfaction was collecting opinions during a conversation with superiors - a rather informal research tool.

The survey also included a question about factors that demotivate or discourage local government employees from working. More than a half of the surveyed secretaries indicated low salaries, instability of the law and excessive duties weighing down on the employee as the most important demotivating factors. An important, though not the most important issue was also the lack of opportunities for professional promotion.

It is worth recalling that when secretaries were asked about actions that could improve the efficiency of the office - it was raising salaries that was most frequently mentioned, and this factor has become more important in recent surveys than in previous ones.

Among the most frequently mentioned demotivating factors, low remuneration and overload

Figure 27. Factors discouraging public office employees from involvement and better work - according to territorial self-government units' secretaries



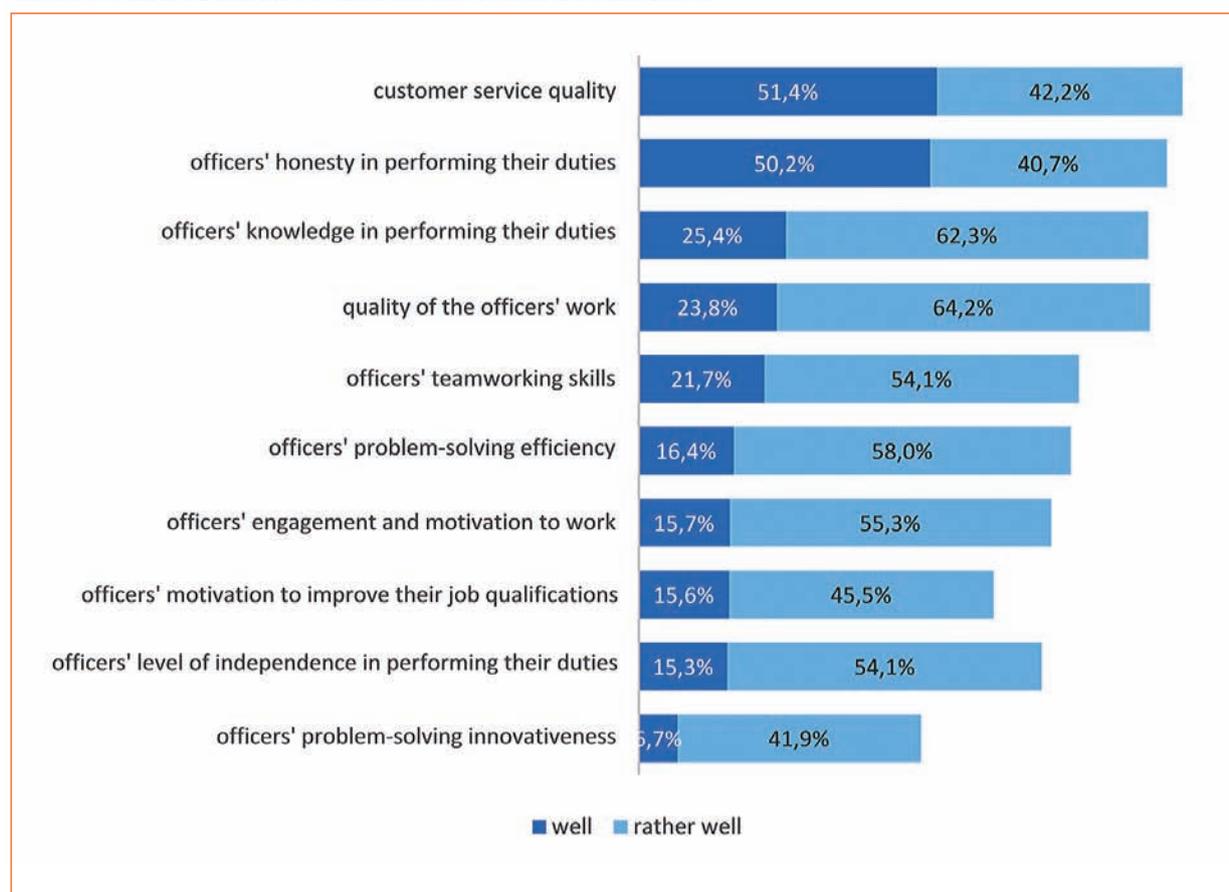
of duties are the most strongly correlated with secretaries' opinion on the level of satisfaction of officials with their work in the office. If we also take into account factors indicated as "important but not the most important", a significant correlation is noted in the case of political interference in the activities of local government and lack of opportunities for professional advancement.

Evaluation of office staff

The data presented in the previous section indicate that secretaries generally consider office workers to be (rather) satisfied with their jobs and in a place that is considered attractive in the marketplace.

Two aspects of officials' professional involvement were rated particularly highly (more than 90% of very good and good ratings) - the quality of customer service and honesty in carrying out professional duties. For these two aspects, the percentage of very good ratings exceeded the percentage of fairly good ratings, while the opposite was true for the other aspects.

Figure 28. Rating of officials on different aspects of their work attitude



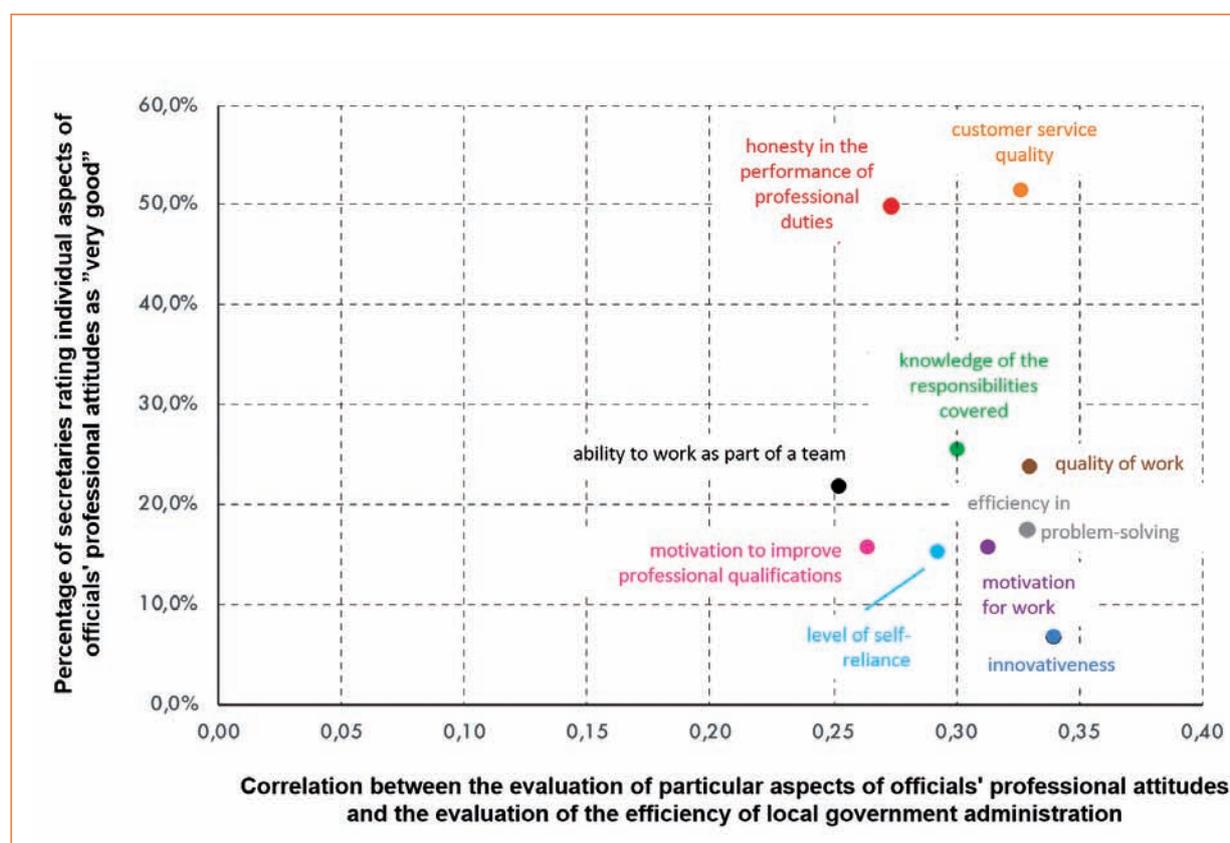
Noteworthy is the low assessment of the innovativeness of officials in solving emerging problems, their level of independence and motivation to improve their professional skills. "Innovation" also received the highest percentage of negative ratings (almost 6%).

In the previous survey from 2016, the ratings of various aspects of officials' engagement were

very similar. Then, too, the same three characteristics: innovativeness, motivation to improve one's own professional skills and level of independence received relatively the least positive ratings. On the one hand, these are elements associated with professional development, but on the other, it seems that the personality profile expected of a good official, which is dominated by responsibility, scrupulousness and compliance with procedures, is to some extent at odds with the expectation of innovation and independence. An attitude of independence and innovation tends to be associated with pushing boundaries and experimenting, which may not always be conducive to good quality official work.

It turns out, however, that innovativeness together with effectiveness in solving problems, quality of work and quality of customer service are the features which are most strongly correlated with the evaluation of self-government administration performance. It is worth noting here that the differences in correlation strength between the ratings of particular aspects of civil servants' work and the efficiency of the institution were very slight indeed, ranging from 0.25 to 0.35.

Figure 29: Relationship of evaluation of various aspects of officials' professional attitudes to office evaluation



On the basis of the assessed aspects of civil servants' professional attitudes, one measure was created³ for analytical purposes, which was called the "civil servants' commitment index".

It turned out that the involvement of civil servants measured in this way, together with the opinion about the efficiency of the local government administration and the belief that civil servants derive satisfaction from their work in the office, are important in the context of the belief that a given city or gmina is a good place to live. Regression analysis was used to examine these

³ Principal components analysis showed that this treatment is justified, as all the examined aspects arrange themselves into one factor, and Cronbach's Alpha is 0.9.

interactions, which shows that this belief is most strongly influenced by the assessment of the efficiency of the administration, but the involvement index and opinions about the satisfaction of civil servants with their work in the administration are also very important.

The relative strength of the impact of individual factors on the opinion of whether a city or municipality is a good place to live is indicated by the values of the "beta" coefficients in the table below. The higher the value of the coefficient, the stronger the effect. All variables included in the model account for 24% of the variation in the dependent variable (opinion of a city as a place to live).

Table 2. Factors influencing the opinion about the town / commune as a good place to live

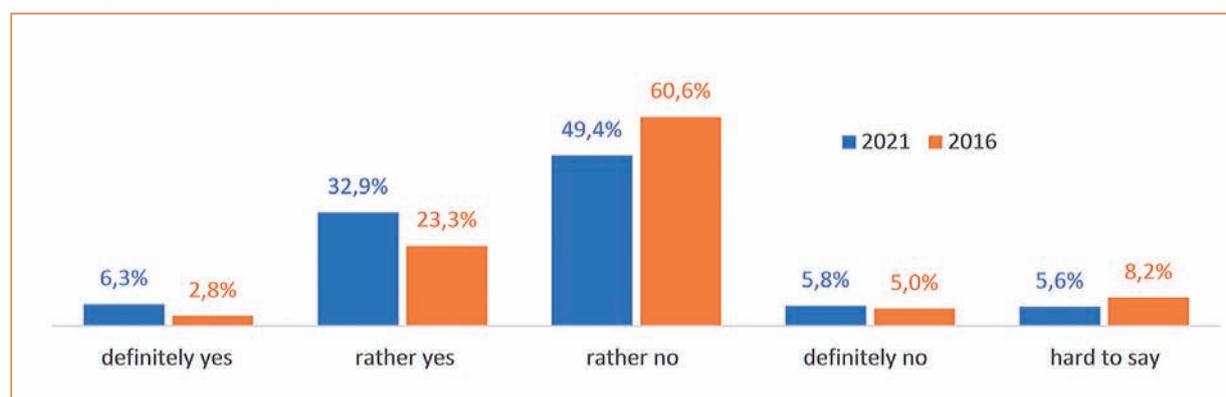
	B	Beta	Materiality level
Evaluation of the efficiency of local administration	0,252	0,327	0,000
Officials' commitment index	0,138	0,141	0,000
Evaluation of job satisfaction of local government officials	0,104	0,150	0,000
Urban <i>gmina</i>	0,172	0,055	0,019
Rural <i>gmina</i>	0,053	0,026	0,263
(Regression equation constant)	3,213		0,000
^(a) the reference value was 'urban/rural municipality'			
Dependent variable: evaluation of the city / municipality as a place to live (from 1 - "very bad" to 7 - "very good")			
R2 = 0,24			

TSU training needs and training experience

Increasing staff competence is one of the most frequently indicated ways of influencing improvement of local government offices by secretaries. Closer analysis also showed that the need to improve competences was most often perceived in offices rated slightly lower (negative significant correlation).

One in three offices perceived problems whose main cause is inadequate knowledge and skills of officials. The share of such offices has increased slightly since 2016, when problems resulting from incompetence were perceived in 26% of offices.

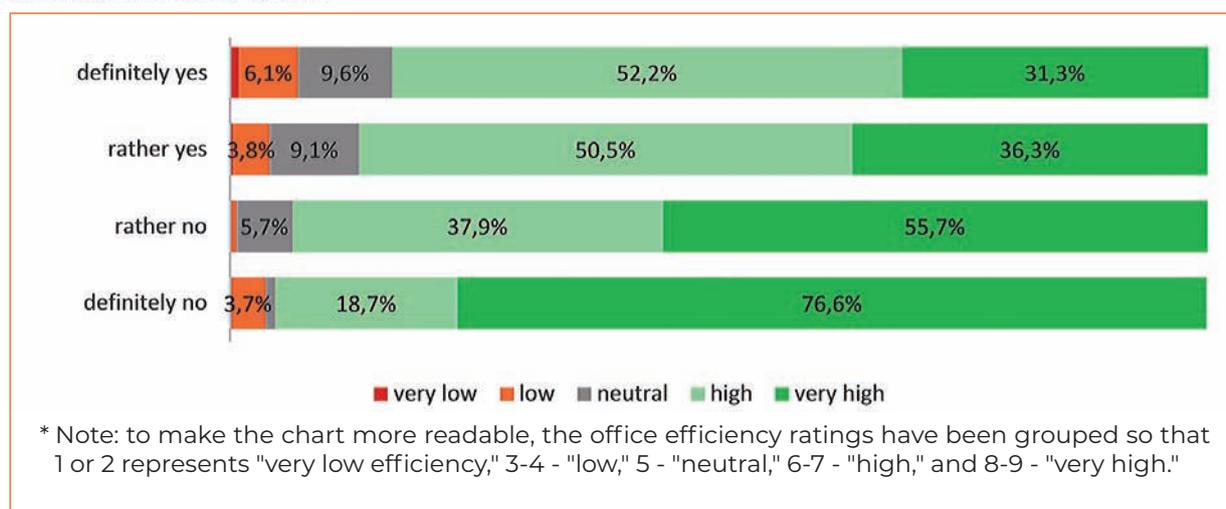
Figure 30. Evaluation of the competence of officials - whether there were problems which main cause is insufficient knowledge and skills of officials.



It is worth mentioning here that at the same time the surveyed secretaries generally rated the competencies of their officials quite high - 25.5% rated those competencies as "very good", and 62.5% as "rather good". At the same time, the higher the competence of officials was rated, the less often problems resulting from deficiencies in their knowledge or skills were indicated (Spearman correlation coefficient 0.302).

The perception of problems related to lack of knowledge and skills of officials was correlated with the evaluation of office efficiency. As can be guessed, the relationship was negative, i.e. the higher the efficiency rating, the lower the tendency to perceive such problems (Spearman correlation coefficient -0.271).

Figure 31. Relationship between evaluation of office efficiency* perception of problems originating from insufficient knowledge and skills of officials.



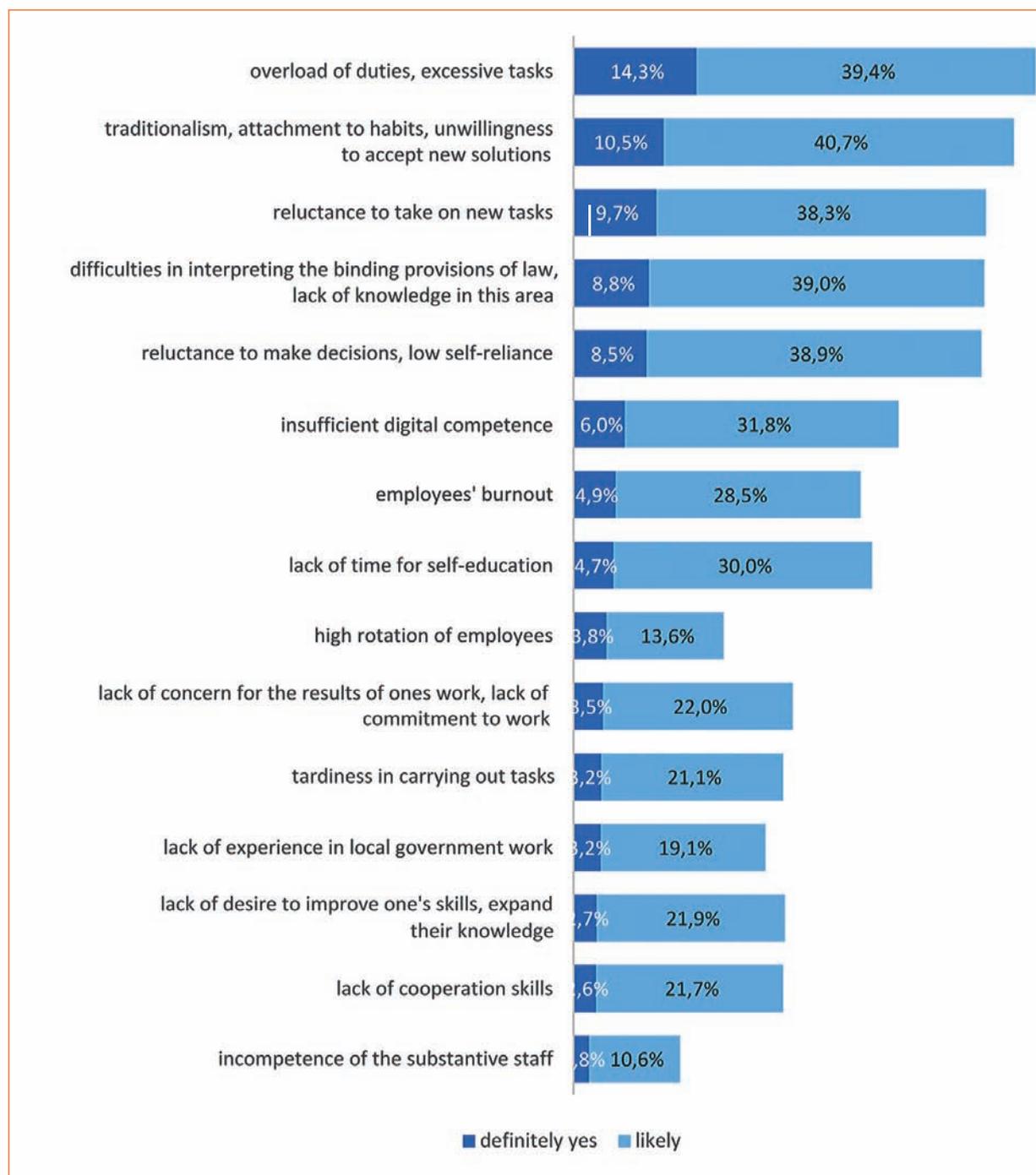
The relationship between the two scores was similar in 2016. The strength of the correlation (Spearman coefficient) was -0.249 at that time.

The secretaries surveyed were also asked about the causes of problems in the performance of office staff. The survey contained a list of 15 possible causes of such problems. The respondents were asked to indicate to what degree these causes affected their local government unit. In the resulting ranking, problems directly related to the lack of knowledge and skills did not appear in first places, i.e. among those most frequently indicated. "Difficulty in interpreting current regulations, lack of knowledge in this area" was indicated by less than half, 48% of secretaries. This issue was ranked fourth in terms of frequency of mention. Other problems in this category were indicated less frequently - for example, problems resulting from insufficient digital skills were mentioned by 38% of respondents (of which 6% considered this to be "definitely" a problem), lack of willingness to improve their skills was mentioned by one in four secretaries (25%, of which 3% "definitely"). The last of the knowledge-related problems already mentioned in the survey, i.e. "incompetence of substantive staff" was indicated even less frequently (11%).

However, if we treat these problems collectively, it turns out that quite a lot (70%) of representatives of self-governments surveyed indicated at least one such problem, and it was most often in cities with powiat rights (82% of secretaries from these cities indicated at least one of the discussed problems concerning the competence of officers as occurring in their office). The remaining types of self-government units were not diversified in terms of the frequency of indicating competence problems.

According to territorial self-government units' secretaries, the most frequent reasons of problems in performing tasks are overloaded with duties and unwillingness to implement new solutions and undertake new tasks. The latter may result of uncertainty as to one's own knowledge or skills - however, this cannot be determined on the basis of the survey.

Figure 32. Causes of problems in performance of tasks by local government employees



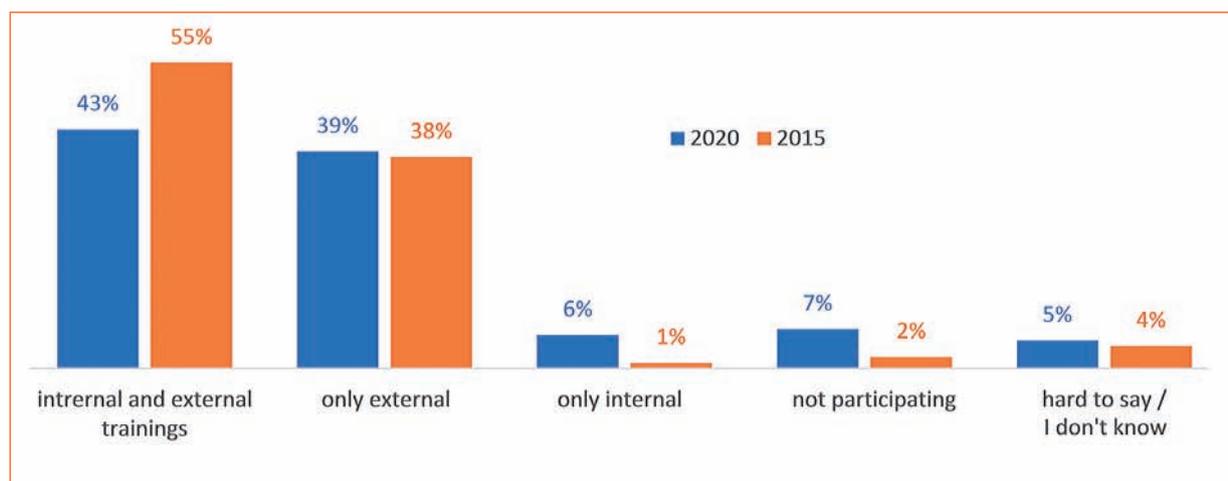
Looking at the declarations of secretaries from the survey analysed here, the first of the listed causes of problems, i.e. "difficulties in interpreting the binding provisions of law" concerned cities with powiat rights more often than other local government units: it was indicated in total by 60% of secretaries from those cities, with 14% of them saying that the problem concerned them "definitely" and another 46% - "rather". Other municipalities were not distinguished by the frequency of indicating this problem. On the other hand, the level of mastering digital technologies concerned all types of municipalities to the same degree.

Participation in training

In accordance with declarations made by secretaries, in the vast majority of the self-government units surveyed, internal or external training courses for office employees were organised in the year preceding the survey. Only 7% of territorial self-government units did not organise any training. External trainings were attended by representatives of 82% of local government units, 50% of offices organised internal trainings. The latter percentage has decreased slightly since 2016, when almost 57% of offices organized such trainings. As five years earlier, internal trainings were organized primarily in municipal offices (65% of secretaries from municipalities confirmed that internal trainings for employees were organized in their office). In other types of territorial self-government units those not organising internal training slightly outnumbered those organising training.

In the 2016 survey, secretaries declared that employees of practically all, 95.8% of the units, participated in various trainings. In 2020, the situation may have been somewhat difficult due to the coronavirus pandemic, but even so, the educational activity of local government employees can be considered high. Participation in both external and internal training was indicated most often.

Figure 33. Office staff participation in external and internal training in 2020 and 2015



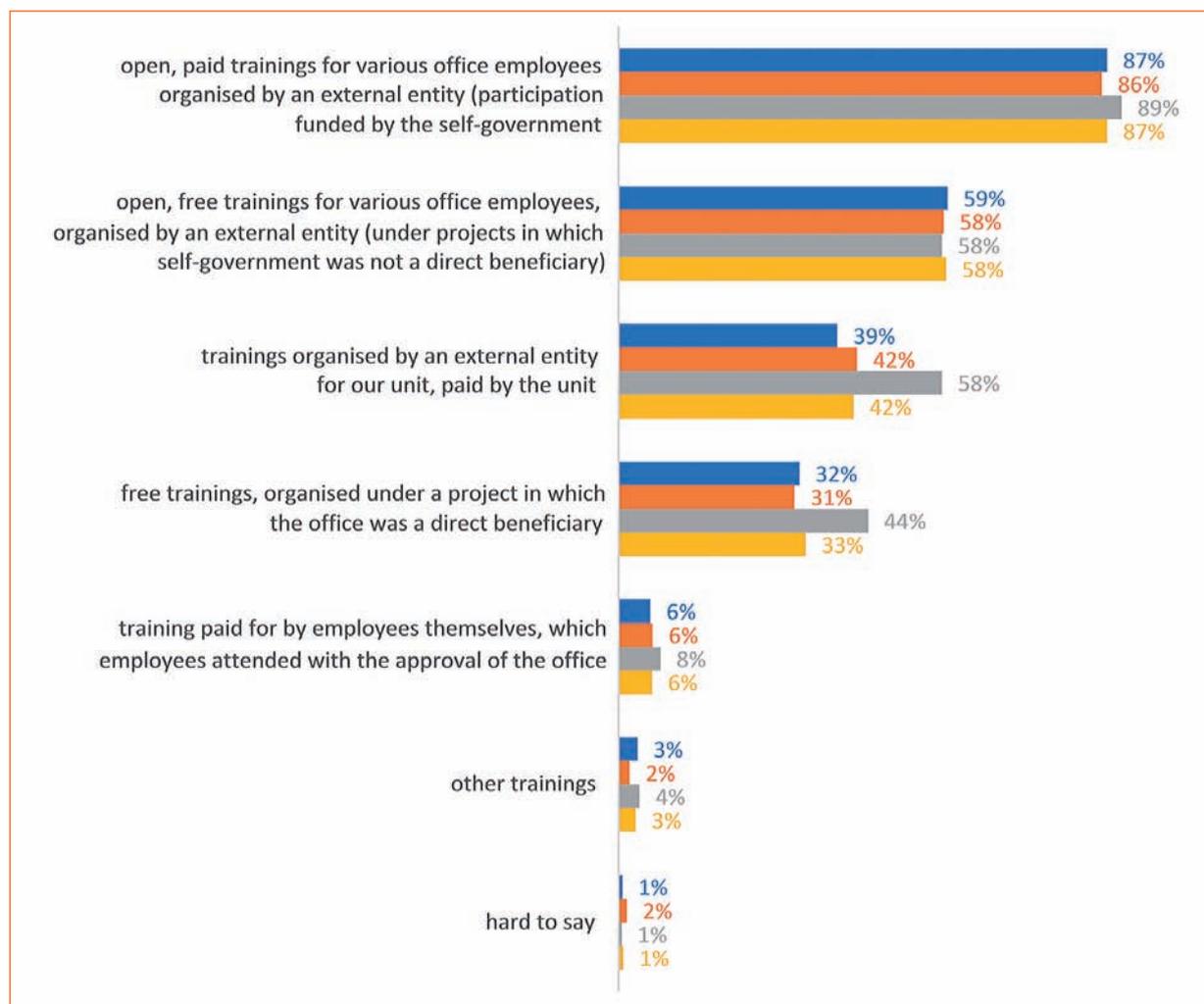
Internal training was usually conducted by one of the institution's employees (this was the case in nearly a half of the institutions where such training was organised - 47% to be precise), sometimes an external lecturer was employed (38% of indications in these institutions). It happened less frequently that training was conducted by a representative of another institution or self-government organisation (17%), or another public institution (15%). In 5% of cases, training was conducted by an employee of one of the organisational units of an office.

External training programmes attended by employees were usually free of charge for them and participation was financed by the office from its budget or within the framework of various projects. It is worth noting that - according to the declarations of secretaries - in half of the cities there were dedicated training courses organised by an external entity especially for the employees of their offices. In rural and urban-rural *gminas* such training was not so frequent, but not rare either. On the other hand, participation of employees in self-paid training programmes was a rarity.

The situation with external training five years ago was similar. In 2021, some types of training were slightly less frequent than they were then - for example, the most frequently indicated open training funded by the authority in 2016 was attended by representatives of almost all,

over 90% of local authorities. In 2021 these percentages were slightly lower (although still very high). The popularity of project-based training remained unchanged and, as five years earlier, it was most often attended by municipal office staff. Thus, it seems that the pandemic affected the sphere of training for self-governments to a small extent.

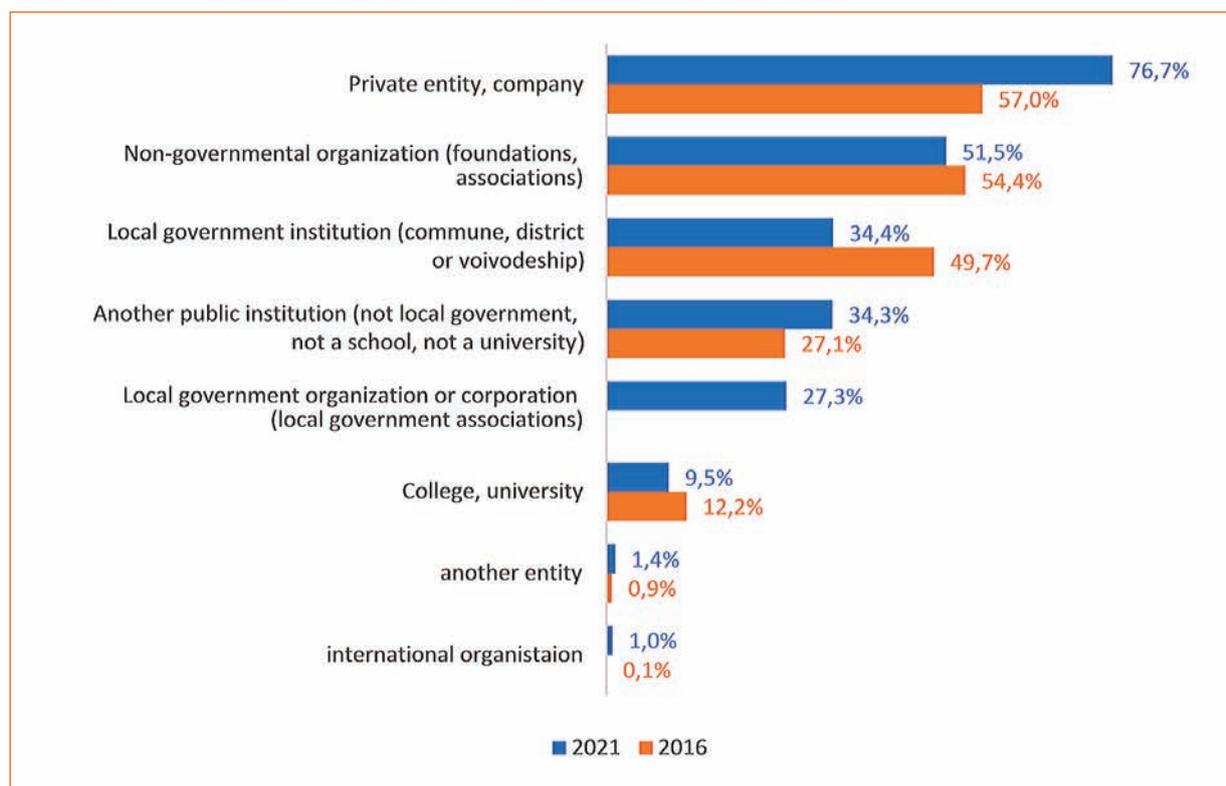
Figure 34. Types of external training attended by office employees during the year



According to information obtained from the secretaries, representatives of more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of self-government units participated in training organised by private entities, and half - in training organised by non-government organisations. In general, services of different types of training providers were used - most often two or three.

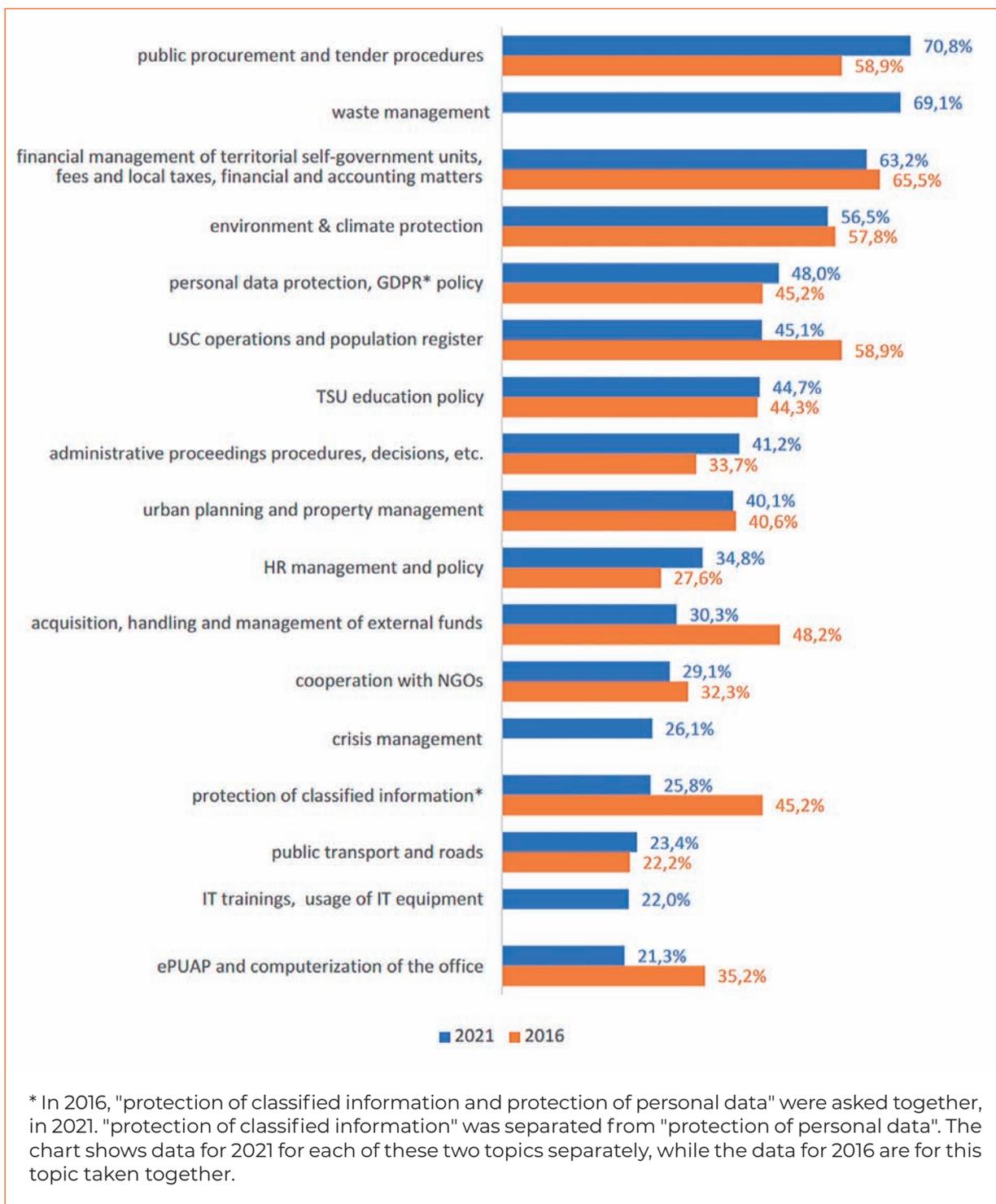
Five years before, the popularity of training organisers was slightly different - the respondents indicated training organised by private entities less frequently, and by self-government organisations more frequently. The popularity of training organised by non-government organisations remained at a similar level.

Figure 35. Providers of external training attended by office staff in 2020 and in 2015.



According to the knowledge obtained from TSU secretaries, the training subjects attended by the staff of offices were very diverse. The survey included a list of 31 topics (one could also add one's own answer), out of which 31% did not select a single topic and another 50% - from one to ten. Most often the employees of the offices were trained in the range of 4 to 9 topics (the average number for all the local authorities surveyed was 5.7).

Figure 36. Topics of training attended by representatives of TSU in 2020 and in 2015.



The chart shows only the topics identified by at least 20% of the secretaries surveyed in 2021. The remaining topics are:

- audit, internal control and management control (16.8%);
- social policy social integration, activity of social assistance institutions (16.6%);
- tasks and responsibilities of councillors, operation of the Council Office (15.8%);

- planning and execution of infrastructure investments (14%);
- organisation of work of the office (13.6%);
- time management (9.1%);
- customer service, organisation of the secretariat, BOK, etc. , (8%);
- human team management teamwork techniques, conflict resolution, etc. , (5,7%);
- strategic management of territorial self-government units (4.8%);
- activities of cultural institutions implementation of cultural policy (4.3%);
- building relationships with the residents, public consultations, cooperation, etc. (3,7%);
- organization of sport events activities of sport and recreation institutions (3.5%);
- ethics and counteracting corruption risks (2.8%)
- language training, selected foreign languages (2%).

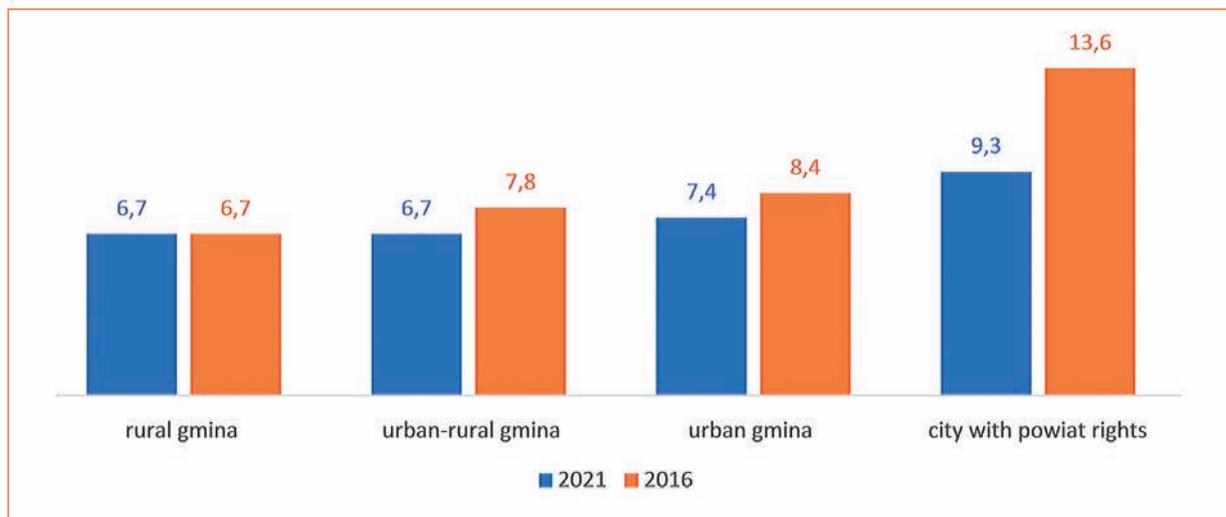
The popularity of individual training topics has changed a little since 2016, which is most likely largely due to the changing situation of local governments, the resolution of some problems and the emergence of new ones. First of all, it can be noted that five years ago there was no training topic so dominant as now "public procurement" and "waste management" chosen today by about 70% of local governments. In 2016, "financial management of local self-governments, local fees and taxes, financial and accounting issues" was most frequently indicated (65.5%), but the popularity of the most frequently indicated training topics listed was less diverse than today. It is also worth noting some areas that have lost their popularity. "USC activities and population registration" was indicated in 2016 by 59% of local governments, in 2021 only by 45%; training on "acquisition, handling and management of external funds" was received by employees of 48% of offices in 2016, and five years later - only 30%; the issue of "protection of classified information and protection of personal data" was indicated by 45% of units in 2016, and five years later - "protection of classified information" was indicated by 26% of units, and "protection of personal data and GDPR" - 48%⁴. At least one of these areas was mentioned by 53% of the surveyed local authorities.

In 2021, the surveyed self-governments reported a slightly less diverse subject of training (number of indicated topics) for TSU than it was in 2016. It is also worth noting that this diversity in 2020 was not correlated with the opinion about the efficiency of self-government administration, while five years earlier such a (weak) correlation was noted ($r = 0.104$).

The diversity of the topics of training was related to the type of local government unit - the largest number of different areas of further training was indicated in cities with county rights, and the smallest - in rural municipalities. In the chart below, we also present the changes that have occurred in this regard since 2016. It can be seen that cities with county rights have reduced the diversity of topics of organized training for employees the most (for this reason, in the graph, cities with county rights have been separated from urban municipalities). In other types of units, the changes are not large.

⁴ The 2021 survey asked separately about "protection of classified information" and "protection of personal data and GDPR".

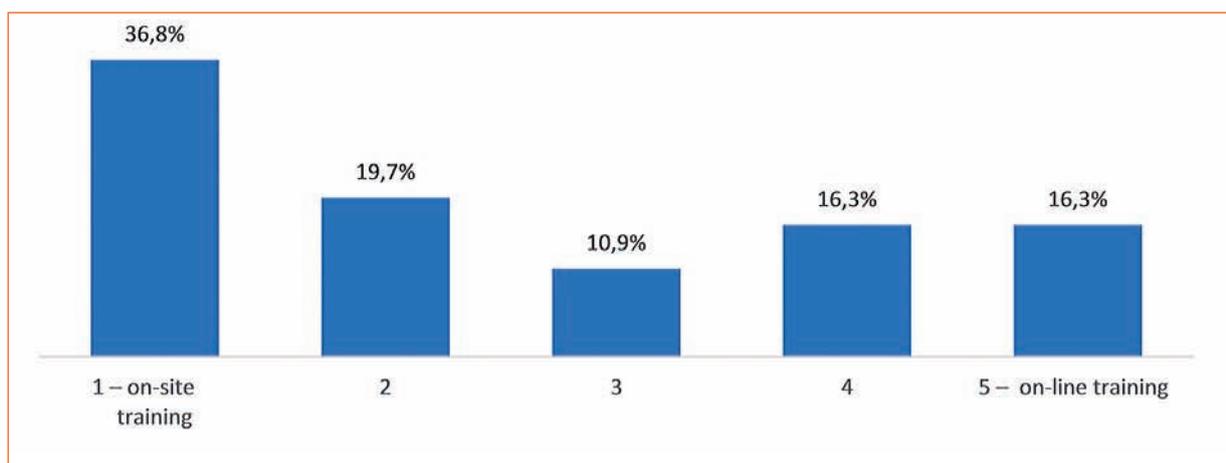
Figure 37. Diversity of topics of training attended by employees in various types of self-government units (average number of topics of training attended by employees of one unit)



The pandemic caused changes in the functioning of all institutions, including local government offices. This was also reflected in the forms of training attended by staff in the offices: 96% participated in live webinars, 90% in online conferences, and 39% used asynchronous training materials.

Almost all of them also admitted that in 2020 the frequency of online training was significantly higher than the year before. However, if they had a choice, they would opt for traditional training. It is worth noting, however, that online training also had its supporters. There were twice as few of them as for traditional training.

Figure 38. Preferences for the form of training (traditional or online) - in 2021.



We write in more detail about the impact of the pandemic on office operations in a separate report devoted solely to this issue.

As one can see from the data presented above, many entities offer training to self-governments, so those interested have a lot to choose from. Therefore, the surveyed secretaries were asked to indicate criteria on the basis of which a decision to send an employee for external training is made in their unit. The respondents ranked the criteria from the most important to the least important. In the table below we compare the average rank given to each criterion with the frequency of indicating a given criterion in the first place.

According to the secretaries, the most important thing is the subject matter of the training and its relevance to the needs of the office or staff. Cost and issues of trust in the organiser or the competence of the trainer tended to be mentioned further down the list.

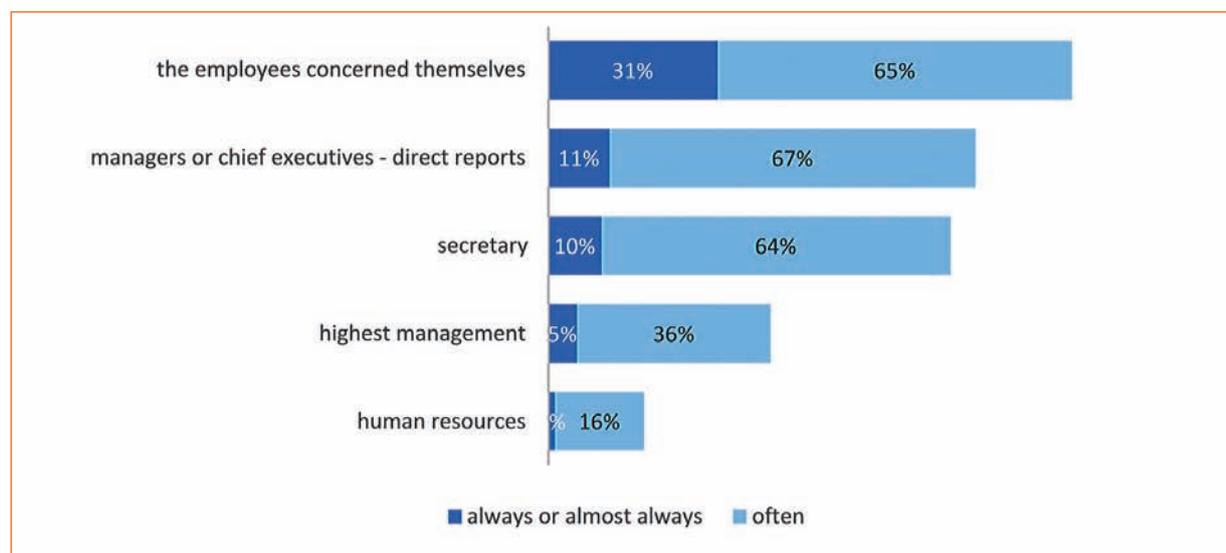
Table 3. Factors influencing the decision on referral to external training

Criteria for the selection of training	Average rank	Percentage of indications of first place
Relevance of the training topics to the current needs of the office	2,32	46,3%
Interest of employees in the topic of training	3,25	17,9%
Belief in the competence of the trainer	3,73	9,2%
Training cost	3,85	12,2%
Confidence in the training provider	4,58	5,7%
Distance of the training location from the municipality	4,89	5,5%
Possibility to participate in online training	5,38	3,2%

In the previous research, in 2016, the hierarchy of factors for choosing a training offer looked very similar, but the cost of training was higher - before the belief in the competence of the trainer, and was more often indicated in first place. This may mean that currently local governments have a bit more money for employee training and pay less attention to the cost of training and more to its quality.

The high position of "interest of employees in the subject of training" in the above ranking is consistent with the secretaries' answers as to who usually takes the initiative of participating in external training. In almost all offices, it is the employees themselves who take the initiative, but in one in three offices this is always or almost always the case, and in 65% it is often the case.

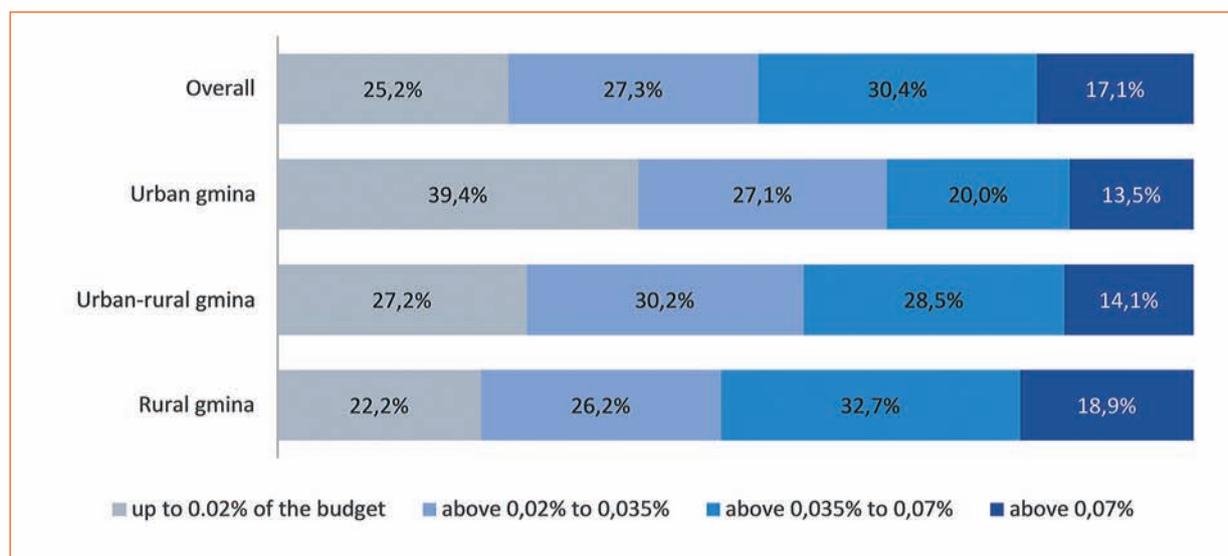
Figure 39. Who takes the initiative to send an employee for external training?



In 2020, nearly one in four offices (22%) funded at least one external training course for councillors. This is a significant decrease from 2016, when representatives of 40% of the surveyed offices declared that the office had funded at least one such training.

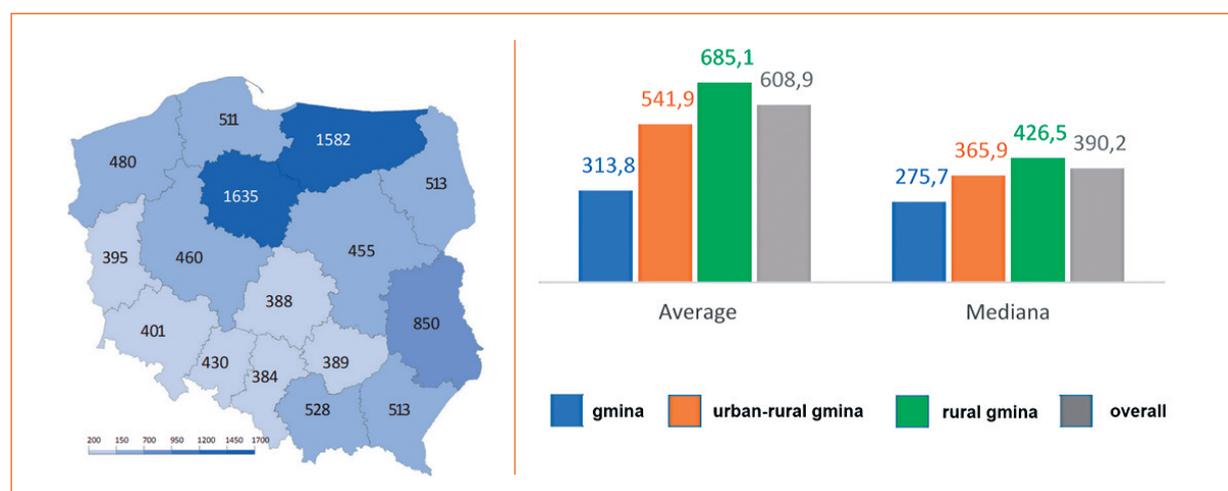
A good indicator of the importance attached by the unit to improving competence of employees is the share of expenditures on training in the gmina budget. The data collected during our survey enable us to make such calculations, but these results should be treated with caution, as many units (about 40%) did not provide sufficient data or the data were unreliable. Therefore, the following information about expenditures on training concerns those 60% of offices from which we obtained reliable data.

Figure 40. Share of expenditures on training of employees in the gmina budget - declaration of TSU secretaries



Expenditures incurred by offices on training their employees differ clearly depending on the size of the office. Municipal offices spend the highest amount, but they are usually larger than offices in other types of territorial self-government units. As a result, when calculated per one official, rural *gminas* spend most - on average almost PLN 700 annually. In the latter group, there is also the highest diversification of expenses between *gminas*. The lowest diversification was noted in urban *gminas*.

Figure 41. Expenditure of self-government offices on education of employees in PLN per one official - by voivodeship and by territorial self-government unit type



A vast majority of the respondents (65%) stated that the level of financing of employee training is adequate, according to 29% the needs are greater. Almost no one stated that the authority spends too much on training. Insufficient financing was most often mentioned by secretaries from city *gminas* (36%), in rural and rural-urban *gminas* the percentage of units in which financing was considered insufficient was equal and amounted to 28%.

Training needs

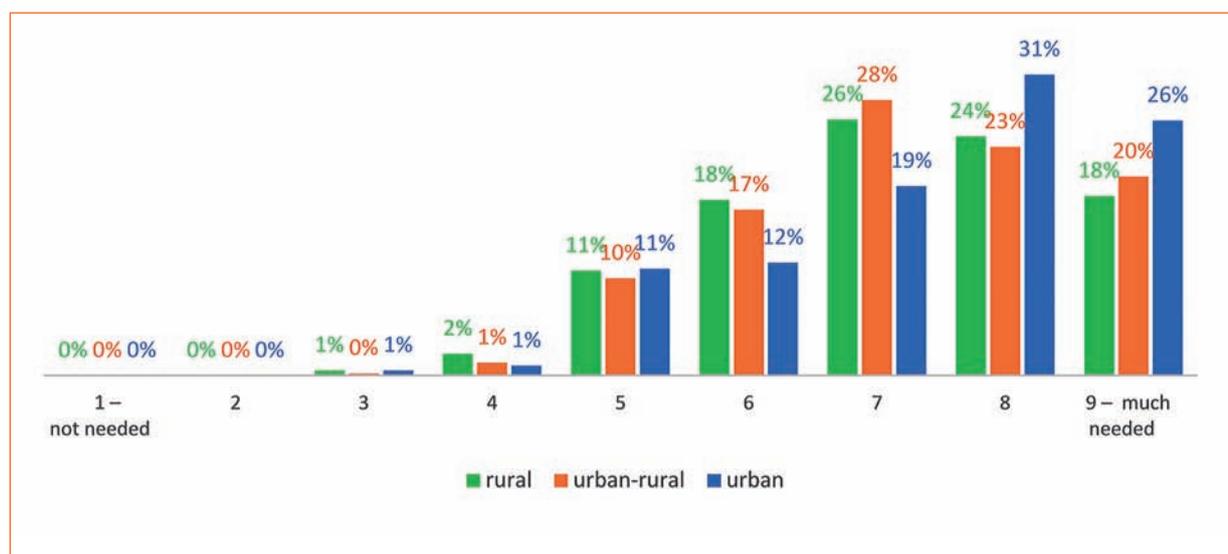
Before presenting the secretaries' replies to the questions on training needs, it is worth recalling that their knowledge of their duties was generally rated fairly high. On the other hand, their motivation to upgrade their professional qualifications was assessed less favourably: less than 16% of the secretaries surveyed rated it as "very good" and 45% as "good".

Lack of training and professional development opportunities were cited as reasons for possible discouragement or lack of motivation in the work of local government employees - 12% of the secretaries surveyed cited this as one of the most important demotivating factors, and a further 40% cited it as an important but not the most important demotivating factor.

In reply to the question concerning the need to develop competences of the office personnel through participation in trainings, a vast majority of the respondents stated that there was such a need. On the nine-point scale, values 7 or 8 were indicated most often, which shows a strong conviction that such training is necessary. What is interesting, the distribution of answers to this question practically did not depend on whether the respondents perceived or did not perceive any problems in the work of the office resulting from the lack of knowledge of its officers.

The need for training was most often indicated by municipal office secretaries. In rural *gminas* this need was indicated a little less often, but also here indications on the right side of the scale prevailed.

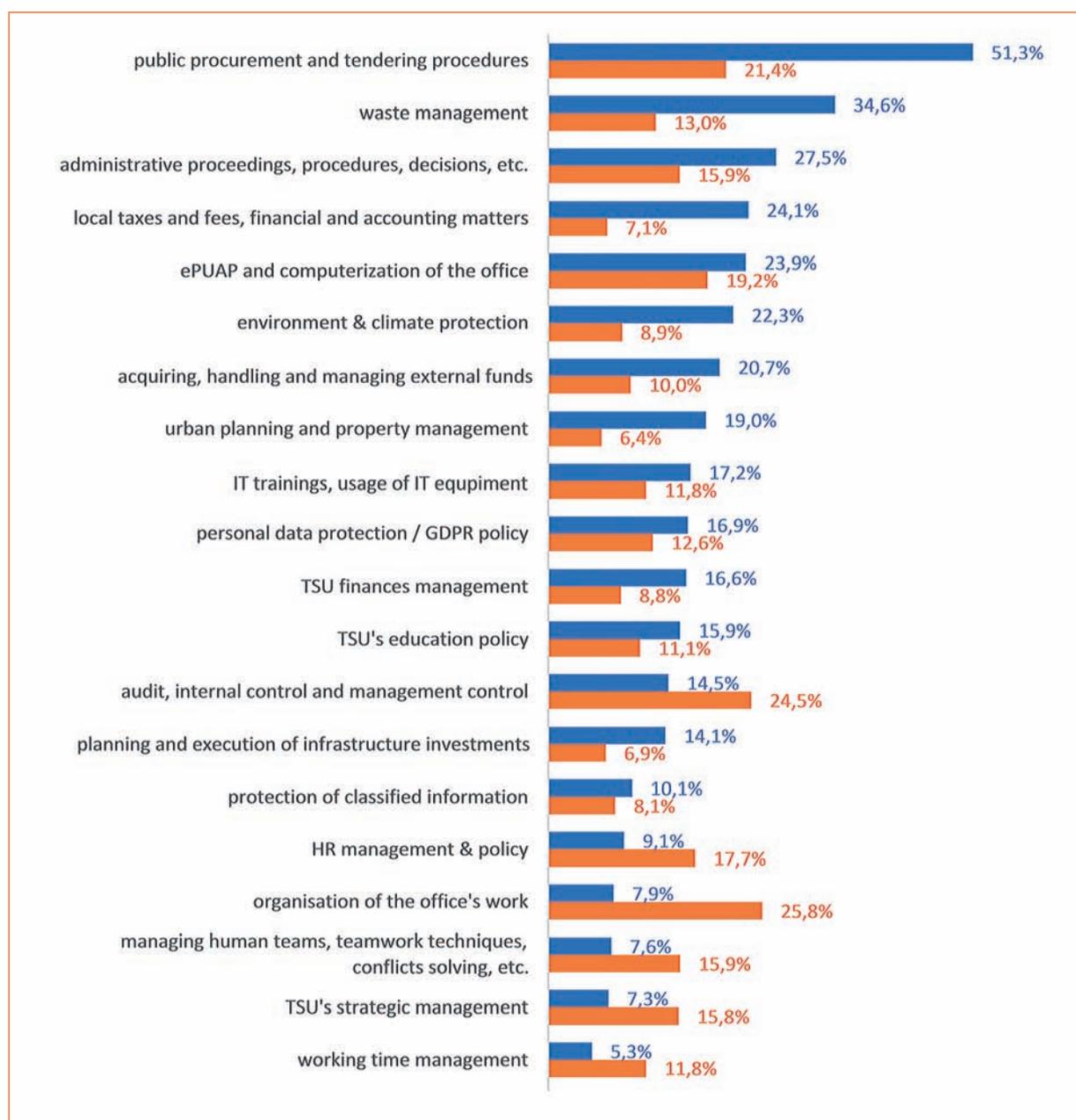
Figure 42. Need for developing competences of employees through trainings - by territorial self-government units type



The survey on the need for training that would help improve the work showed differences between the needs of TSU secretaries and of other staff members. One should remember that in both cases, the information about training needs was provided by secretaries.

From the perspective of streamlining the work in an office, the most frequently voiced interest in trainings related to procedures and proceedings - public orders and tenders, administrative proceedings. The subject of waste management also turned out to be interesting. On the other hand, for their own needs, secretaries most often expressed a desire to participate in trainings concerning what they deal with directly, i.e. the management of the office - organisation of the office work, audit and management control, ePUAP and management control. Public procurement and bidding procedures were also among the topics of interest for TSU secretaries.

Figure 43. Training postulates of TSU secretaries - demand for training for self-government offices employees and for TSU secretaries



The chart shows the topics that received 10% or more indications from any category. The following topics were indicated less frequently (brackets the number of indications in the training needs category for the office and for secretaries):

- crisis management (9%; 6%);
- public transport and roads (9%; 4%);
- USC operations and civil registration (7%, 3%);
- customer service, organisation of the secretariat, BOK, etc. (6%; 6%);
- cooperation with NGOs (5%; 4%);
- tasks and responsibilities of councillors, operation of the Council Office (5%; 4%);
- building relationships with the residents public consultations, cooperation, etc. (4%; 6%);
- language training selected foreign languages (4%; 5%);
- social policy social integration, activity of social assistance institutions (3%; 1%);
- ethics and counteracting corruption risks (3%; 3%);
- activities of cultural institutions implementation of cultural policy (1%; 1%);
- organisation of sport events activities of sport and recreation institutions (1%; 1%).

The list of training demands of TSU secretaries has changed noticeably since the previous survey in 2016. First of all, five years earlier there was no such dominant subject area as "public procurement and tender procedures", reported by more than half of the offices in the last survey. In 2016, this topic was indicated by only 31.5% of the surveyed secretaries, and the most frequently indicated topic was ePUAP and computerization of the office (42.2% of indications).

It is worth comparing the topic areas most frequently indicated in 2016 and 2021. We take 25% of the indications as the limit. There were five such topics in 2016:

- ePUAP and computerization of the office (42.2% of indications);
- acquiring, handling and managing external funds (32.5%);
- public procurement and tendering procedures (31.5%);
- administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions (29.8%);
- audit, internal control and management control (28.3%).

The next ranked "protection of classified information and protection of personal data" received less than $\frac{1}{4}$, i.e. 24.2% of indications.

In 2021, the most popular postulated training topics for offices (selected according to the same criterion, i.e. at least 25% of indications) were only three:

- public procurement and tendering procedures (51.3%),
- waste management (34.6%),
- administrative proceedings, procedures, decisions (27.5%).

Topics of importance in 2016 fell further down the list of secretaries' choices, with "ePUAP" indicated by less than 24% of respondents, "raising external funds" by representatives of one in five offices (20.7%), and "audit and management control" by less than 15%.

Familiarity and cooperation with FRDL

The activity of the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy is well known in Polish self-governments. Only 6% of the surveyed secretaries stated that they did not know anything about this organisation. During the 5 years that elapsed between the two surveys presented here, the percentage of local governments in which the Foundation's activity is known "very well" increased slightly. In general, however, one may say that the level of information of Polish self-governments about the Foundation's activity remains stable.

It is noteworthy that there is a geographical variation in the awareness of FRDL - it is least known in Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, and best known in Podlasie and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeships. Since 2016, the visibility (awareness) of the Foundation has improved in central Poland - in Mazowieckie, Łódzkie and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeships.

Figure 44. Knowledge of the activities of the Jerzy Reguiski Foundation for the Development of Local Democracy in 2021 and in 2016.

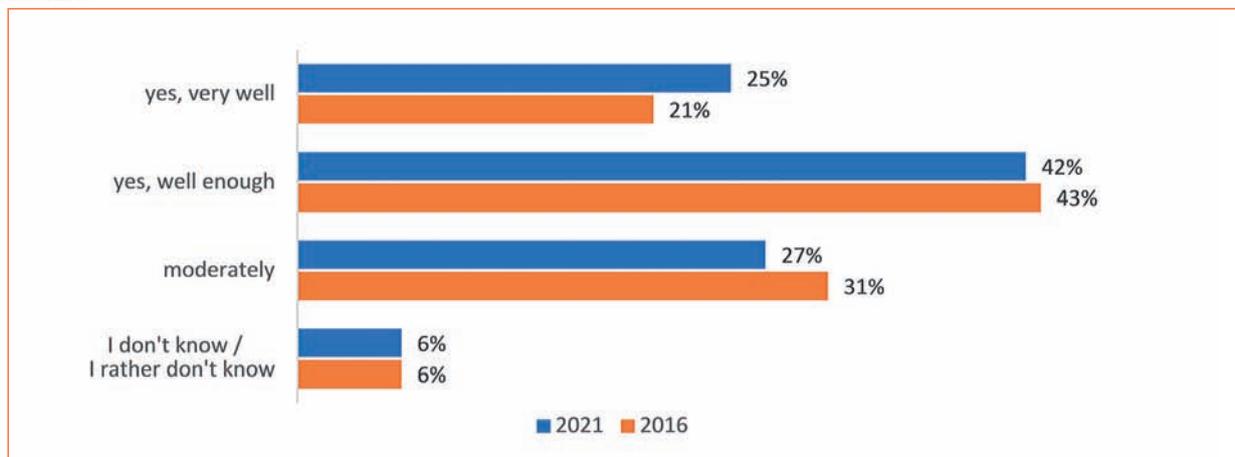
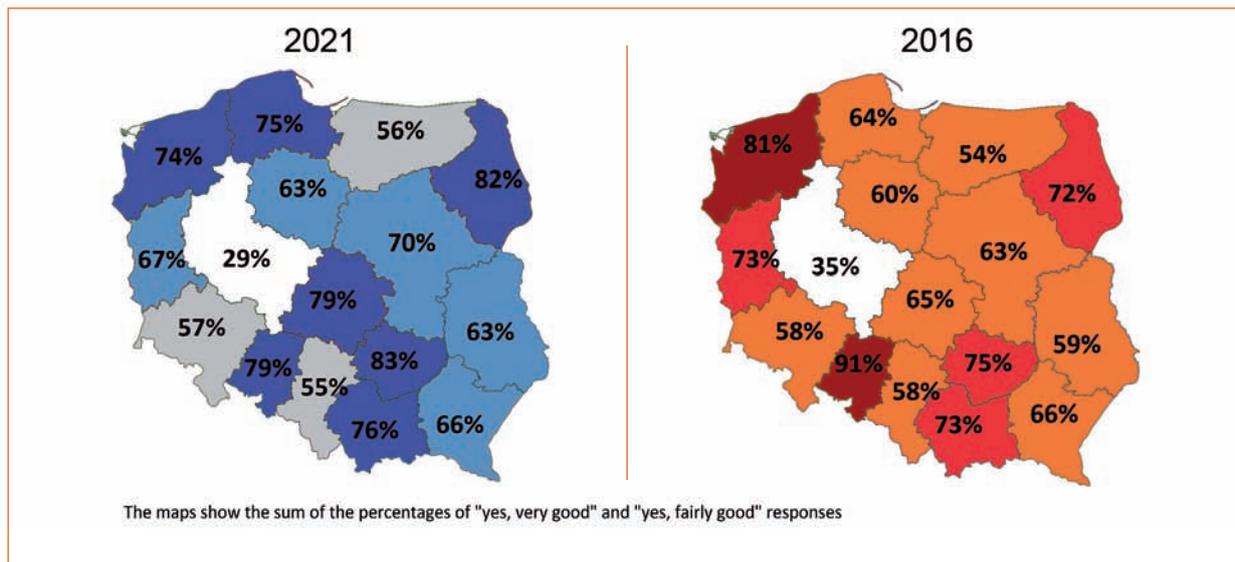


Figure 45. Geographic distribution of familiarity with the activities of the Jerzy Reguiski Foundation for the Development of Local Democracy in 2021 and in 2016.



The popularity of FRDL training is best demonstrated by the fact that in 2020 representatives of 64% of TSU participated in its various forms - both stationary and online.

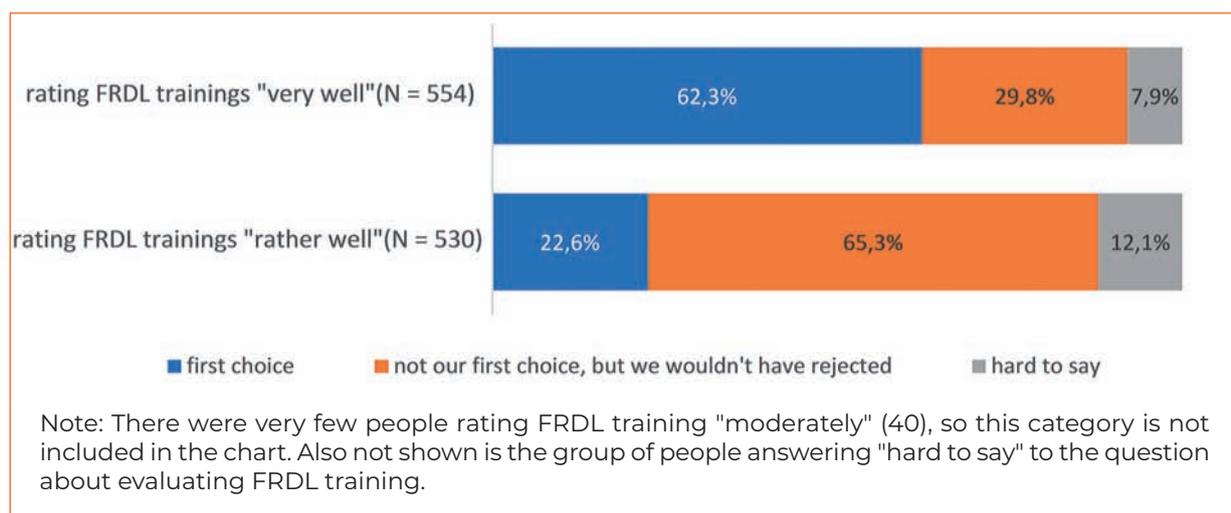
Figure 46. Participation of representatives of territorial self-government units surveyed in training organised by PRF



Secretaries from territorial self-government units whose representatives participated in training organised by FRDL assessed these trainings most often positively, but about a half of them gave "very good" marks and a half - "rather good", less than 4% evaluated the training "moderately".

This evaluation was reflected in the anticipated reaction to the Foundation's training offer - those who evaluated the training "very well" were much more prone to respond that the Foundation's offer would be their first choice in case of the need to train an employee, than it was in case of those who gave somewhat lower marks to training. If we take into account all the respondents, for 30% of them the FRDL offer would be the first choice, for 50% - not the first choice, but to be considered, while one in five had no opinion on this matter.

Figure 47. Significance of the evaluation of training provided by FRDL for the willingness to use further training offered by the Foundation



About 10% of the surveyed territorial self-government units were beneficiaries of the FRDL projects financed from EU or other external funds. Almost all secretaries from these units were satisfied with the cooperation with the Foundation and 60% gave the highest marks (8 or 9 on a 9-point scale).

Summary

The aim of the study discussed here was to find out the situation of Polish local governments in 2021 and to identify changes that have occurred in this sphere since 2016, i.e. since the previous research.

The situation of self-governments was examined from the point of view of gmina secretaries, i.e. persons responsible for the management of offices and for improving the qualifications of the officials working there. As many as 2,477 *gminas* were invited to participate in the survey, and 2123 completed questionnaires were received, which means that the survey can be regarded as having been carried out on the entire population.

Local development priorities and management difficulties

- Among development priorities, "infrastructure investments" was most frequently indicated. In the previous survey (2016), this priority competed with "improving the quality of public services" in terms of frequency of indications - particularly in urban municipalities. In 2021, however, infrastructure development was by far the most frequently indicated priority.
- We observe a similar situation from the point of view of tasks, the implementation of which should be a priority for self-governments according to the surveyed secretaries. Their list in 2021 opens with road infrastructure, indicated by nearly 61% of TSUs. In 2016, this task was indicated by 71% of local governments, but education and pre-school care were mentioned almost as often (68%) - so the importance of both tasks from the category of public services and infrastructure investments was quite commonly perceived. In 2021, infrastructure was clearly dominant among the desired priorities, but this year, for the first time, environmental and climate protection was asked about and proved popular - nearly half of the survey participants chose this as an area requiring particular support from local governments.
- The vast majority, around $\frac{3}{4}$, of Polish local governments have a current development strategy, and another 14% plan to create such a document within the next year. Residents are often involved in the preparation of the strategy in various forms, although the percentage of local governments involving residents in the work on strategic documents has decreased since 2016. Residents are most often included in those situations where the strategy is developed with the support of external entities.
- Among the most important problems hindering local governance, secretaries mainly indicated "instability of legislation". The importance of this problem (frequency of indication) has increased since the previous survey. In 2016, the most frequently cited problem hindering governance was "insufficient own revenue" indicated by 62% of respondents. In 2021, as many as 40% of local governments complained about insufficient revenues.

Determinants of the efficiency of self-governments

- The secretaries surveyed generally gave fairly high ratings to the efficiency of the offices they managed. Similarly, they assessed their *gminas* as good places to live in. Some problem areas evidencing deficiencies in the efficiency of self-governments were indicated (e.g. implementation of electronic administration, public transport, education policy), but 2/3 of the surveyed units did not report any task which would be seriously difficult to perform.
- According to the surveyed secretaries, the work of self-government offices could be made more efficient by increasing the remuneration of officers and their competences. The latter issue is related to the issue of training for self-governments and making use of training offered by various entities. A separate part of the survey was devoted to this.
- According to declarations of secretaries, evaluation of the quality of local government offices' work is not something commonly used in Polish self-governments. Only 15% of offices had conducted a self-evaluation with the use of a formalised tool within two years preceding the survey.

The office as a workplace

- From the perspective of the secretaries surveyed, working in a local government office seems attractive compared to other opportunities offered by the market. Moreover, the secretaries are also of the opinion that the employees of the offices are also rather satisfied with their jobs.
- Some offices have conducted a satisfaction survey of their employees, but few do so regularly.
- Among the main factors demotivating or limiting the attractiveness of employment in the office, the most frequently mentioned were: "low salaries", "excess responsibilities" and "changing legislation". The latter, we understand, translates into the job being more difficult than one might expect.

Training needs and experiences

- In every third office, problems were perceived to be mainly caused by insufficient knowledge and skills of officials. In 2021, almost all offices organised external and/or internal training for their staff. The pandemic situation hindered this only slightly, although the percentage of offices not organising training increased from 2% in 2016 to 7% in 2021.
- Representatives of more than 3/4 of self-government units participated in trainings organised by private entities and half - by non-government organisations.
- Foundation in Support of Local Democracy is an important entity on the self-government training market. The Foundation in Support of Local Democracy is known to most secretaries, among others, because they had a chance to participate in training organised by the Foundation themselves. The secretaries' own positive experiences of training encourage them to use the Foundation's training offer.



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The Foundation in Support of Local Democracy

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