

Social Response in Poland in 1944–1948

Abstract

The article concerns the field of social care and social assistance in the first years of the Polish People's Republic as they were provided to individuals who suffered distress during World War Two. The timeline of the paper covers the period from 1944 to 1948. At that time, the focus of social care and social assistance was satisfying the fundamental needs of the people, in particular in environments affected by the destruction of war. It included, among others, ensuring food, health care, accommodation, education and employment. The scale of the relief provided after the war by various Polish and international institutions was unprecedented in the history of the Polish social service, covering one in four Poles, i.e. over 6 million people in total.

Keywords: human services, relief provided after the war, social assistance, social care, social work, social response

In the first years of Polish People's Republic, social care and social assistance consisted in social response, i.e. ad hoc help for people who had suffered during the war. The period of social response started after the end of military operations and lasted until 1948¹. To be precise, the social work methodology distinguishes two stages of aid in the event of disasters: immediate intervention and long-term intervention². Thus, the postwar response was in fact the second stage of helping the victims of war (following the first stage implemented during the war by, among others, the Central Welfare Council³). Social care and assistance at that time focused on providing for the basic needs of people, especially in the

¹ Some authors see 1947 as the final year. Depending on the region, military operations in Poland came to an end already in 1944, therefore it seems less justified to refer to "the end of World War II" in this context.

² SZMAGALSKI, J., "Praca socjalna w sytuacjach katastrof i klęsk", *Praca Socjalna* 1997/1, p. 37.

³ See: KROLL, B., *Rada Główna Opiekuńcza*, Warszawa 1985.

environments severely affected by the destruction of war⁴. It included e.g. food provisioning, healthcare, housing, education and employment⁵. The scale of the relief provided after the war was unprecedented in the history of the Polish social service, covering one in four Poles, i.e. over 6 million people in total⁶.

Social response activities were diverse in Polish regions gradually liberated from the Nazi rule. The operations of the Central Welfare Council were replaced or complemented by reviving social and welfare organizations as from 1944, when the part of Poland east of the Vistula river was freed⁷.

One of the first initiatives was to help the people left without a roof over their heads. The housing situation in the aftermath of the war was disastrous, especially in the cities that had been destroyed. Warsaw suffered more than any other city in Europe⁸ and a large part of the population lived in overcrowded flats (10–15 people on a dozen square meters). People looked for shelter in the basements of burned houses or at leaking attics etc. Social assistance consisted in some financial help, modest support of renovations and taking children to school (as a result, around 95% could attend classes)⁹.

Social response was also needed in villages. Tapping into the natural resources of the countryside, the act on mutual aid was adopted to satisfy the needs of the paupers. After the end of military operations, many farmsteads in Poland suffered from the insufficiency of livestock, tools, animals (the number of horses dropped by 60%) and workforce, while some areas of military operations were depopulated or not cleared of mines. Only partial sowing in the autumn of 1944 could lead to food shortage and it had to be extended in spring. In an attempt to face these issues, Edward Bertold, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms, signed the *Resolution on the obligation of mutual neighbourly aid*¹⁰, which stipulated that farmstead owners should help their neighbours in cultivating

⁴ WÓDZ, K., *Slużby społeczne w Polsce. Geneza, kierunki rozwoju, metody pracy*, Katowice 1982, p. 28.

⁵ *Poradnik Pracownika Socjalnego*, ed. J. ROSNER, third edition (amended), Warszawa 1973, p. 20.

⁶ CZYŻOWSKA, Z., *Świadczenia socjalne w czterdziestoleciu PRL*, Warszawa 1987, p. 108; KAR-CZEWSKI, M., *Opieka społeczna*, [in:] *Polityka społeczna*, ed. A. RAJKIEWICZ, Warszawa 1979, p. 501.

⁷ PAWŁOWSKA, W., *Po roku 1945*, [in:] *Opieka społeczna w Warszawie 1923–1947*, eds. M. GŁAD-KOWSKA et al., Warszawa 1995, p. 71.

⁸ After the renovations, the percentage of usable buildings was: 59% in the Praga district, 15% in the centre, 37% in the northern district, 41% in the southern district, and 17% in the western district. After the city was liberated, water and sewage systems were not functional and the installed electric power was sufficient for a dozen houses. The gradual reconstruction failed to satisfy the needs of the inhabitants, also due to their growing number: out of 1.3 million inhabitants before the war, there left 130,000 at the moment of liberation (January 1945), in March it was 350,000, and in May the number exceeded 400,000. See: Przemówienie prezydenta m. st. Warszawy Tołwińskiego w dn. 5 maja 1945 w czasie VII sesji KRN, [in:] *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Krajowej Rady Narodowej w dn. 3, 4 i 5 maja 1945*, Warszawa 1945, pp. 242–243.

⁹ FRANCISZKIEWICZ, L., “Przystosowanie polityki opiekuńczej do wymagań normalizującego się życia społecznego”, *Opiekun Społeczny* 1948/5–6, pp. 191–192.

¹⁰ “Rozporządzenie Ministra Rolnictwa i Reform Rolnych z dnia 11 kwietnia 1945 r. o obowiązku sąsiedzkiej pomocy wzajemnej w gospodarstwach rolnych na rok 1945”, *Journal of Laws* 1945, No. 15, item 87.

the land as soon as they finish work on their own fields or to take care of one's own and the neighbour's field and livestock. The precedence to receive help belonged to families with people who fought the Germans, active soldiers, people deported by the occupant in camps and former prisoners¹¹. The supervision over the implementation of the resolution which aimed primarily at the sowing campaign in spring was entrusted to local authorities: village mayors and district heads acting in collaboration with commune and district national councils and the Union of Peasant Self-Help. The resolution did not specify any aid from central authorities, though such aid was expressly mentioned by the Prime Minister, E. Osóbka Morawski, at the beginning of 1945¹². Ultimately, a part of the sowing campaign was carried out by the army (mainly in the Recovered Territories)¹³ and support was also provided by the Soviet Union¹⁴. Since problems with sowing the fields recurred in the next year, a similar resolutions was signed one year later by Stanisław Mikołajczyk, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms¹⁵.

The tasks of Caritas which had an extensive network all over Poland were defined in the first years after war by the needs of the people and consisted mainly in immediate aid. Caritas ran more than 500 facilities which e.g. provided meals (they were often free of charge or cheap for pensioners and people who earned petty salaries), railway station houses (for travellers, refugees, migrants, the homeless etc.), care stations for mothers and children and night shelters (for migrants or people on their way home, with a limited stay of 3 days)¹⁶. In the areas where the church institutions of charity could not be revived or initiated due to organisational reasons, the Church joined the secular humanitarian organisations by providing direct help or designating a part of the collection¹⁷.

The social assistance also covered Jews who had survived. Jews started forming entities the provided postwar aid when the Polish Committee of National Liberation was established in the freed city of Lublin. An independent Office for the Aid to Jewish People

¹¹ The resolution mentions only fighting the Germans and German imprisonment.

¹² E. Osóbka-Morawski spoke of providing grain and machines to farmers as well as aid to city inhabitants who would like to grow gardens with fruit and vegetables. See: Przemówienie E. Osóbki-Morawskiego w czasie VI sesji KRN w dn. 2 stycznia 1945, [in:] *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Krajowej Rady Narodowej w dn. 31 grudnia 1944 oraz 2 i 3 stycznia 1945 r.*, Warszawa 1946, p. 82.

¹³ See: Sprawozdanie Komisji Wojskowej o wniosku w sprawie udziału Wojska Polskiego w akcji żniwnej (poseł E.L. Odorkiewicz), [in:] *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Krajowej Rady Narodowej w dn. 20, 21, 22 i 23 września 1946*, Warszawa 1946, pp. 384–386.

¹⁴ Przemówienie Prezesa Rady Ministrów E. Osóbki-Morawskiego w dn. 3 maja 1945 w czasie VII sesji KRN, [in:] *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Krajowej Rady Narodowej w dn. 3, 4 i 5 maja 1945*, Warszawa 1945, p. 26.

¹⁵ “Rozporządzenie Ministra Rolnictwa i Reform Rolnych z dnia 19 lipca 1946 r. o obowiązku sąsiedzkiej pomocy wzajemnej w gospodarstwach rolnych”, *Journal of Laws* 1946, No. 35, item 222. See: Referat Ministra Rolnictwa i reform Rolnych o akcji siewnej, [in:] *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Krajowej Rady Narodowej w dn. 29, 30, 31 grudnia 1945 oraz w dn. 2 i 3 stycznia 1946 r.*, Warszawa 1946, pp. 225–231.

¹⁶ ZAMIATAŁA, D., op. cit., pp. 192–201, JASIŃSKI, S., “O dziełach miłosierdzia”, *Caritas* 1946/4, pp. 7–12.

¹⁷ WĘSIERSKI, R., “Caritas czy humanitaryzm”, *Caritas* 1945/1–2, p. 10.

was set up by the Committee and supervised by Dr Sz. Herszernhorn who helped Jews leaving their hiding place or crossing the front line as well as children rescued from the Majdanek concentration camp. In view of the extensive needs, the Jewish Committee was established in July 1944 in order to improve aid and activate self-help. The reviving Jewish parties, e.g. Bund, Poale Zion and Ichud, led to the transformation of the Jewish Committee into a political organization called the Central Committee of Polish Jews in October 1944, thereafter renamed the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Polish abbreviation: CKŻP). CKŻP started establishing local structures and its operations covered all aspects of the Jewish community revival. The rescue and aid activities were performed mainly by the Social Welfare Department (distribution of food packages and clothes, providing food allowances and grants, aid to Poles who had helped Jews during the war¹⁸). Furthermore, the Records Department registered the salvaged, searched for families and recovered personal ID documents; the Legal Department provided support in reclamation of properties, finding children that had been in hiding, documenting collaboration, recording testimonies of witnesses in the trials of war criminals, legal aid to people at conflict with the law and care for prisoners, while the Childcare Department set up orphanages, dormitories, sanatoriums, summer camps and sports clubs¹⁹. In terms of ideological standpoint, the organisation stood up for the Soviet rule imposed in Poland and accused the London government of complicity in the Holocaust²⁰. Apart from CKŻP, religious congregations emerged and often opposed the Committee. They organised the religious life and provided social assistance and education²¹.

Aid to resettled and repatriated people

The prospect of inevitable postwar migrations had been present in the international awareness almost since the outbreak of military operations. Only six weeks after the first days of the war, Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees as follows: “when this horrible war ends, there may be not one million, but 10 or 20 million men, women and children who will enter the wide arena which is the issue of refugees”²². From that time on, international organisations started preparing for repatriation.

¹⁸ This assistance was provided in collaboration with the Legal Department until 1948 when the Committee for Aid to Poles was established.

¹⁹ CAŁA, A., *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce*, [in:] A. CAŁA, H. WĘGRZYNEK, G. ZALEWSKA, *Historia i kultura Żydów Polskich. Słownik*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 42–44.

²⁰ See: ŻARYN, J., *Hierarchia Kościoła katolickiego wobec relacji polsko-żydowskich w latach 1945–1947*, [in:] *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, Warszawa 2006, p. 110.

²¹ CAŁA, A., op. cit., p. 43.

²² ROOSEVELT, F.D., “Address to the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees, October 17, 1939”, *Department of State Bulletin*, vol. I, No. 17, 21 Oct 1939; quoted in: KERSTEN, K., *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej. Studium historyczne*, Wrocław 1974, p. 67.

The repatriation preparations by the Polish government-in-exile also started relatively early. The first document related to postwar resettlements in Poland was drawn by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of the London government in 1943. It was assumed that the activities would be supervised by the Central International Office for Repatriation, while the local Polish centres for repatriates were supposed to perform official tasks (nationality verification and document issuance) as well as provide sanitary aid, food and clothes²³. The London government's further international preparations for the postwar repatriation of Poles remaining outside their homeland proved futile, since the pro-Soviet authorities in Poland that started ruling in 1944 were not interested in continuing or even learning more about those preparations. As put by Krystyna Kersten: "the country's political centres which established the State National Council and were then incorporated into the Polish Committee of National Liberation and the Provisional Government had no information about the Polish emigration after 1939. They also had little knowledge of preparations for repatriation and maintained no contacts with international organisations. (...) the repatriation initiative by the authorities that intended to build Poland on the new system foundations started from a dead point"²⁴. The takeover of the repatriation coordinator role by the Polish Committee of National Liberation and then by the Provisional Government led politicians who supported the London government to stand against repatriation²⁵.

To carry out resettlement and repatriation for at least 9 million people was definitely a great challenge for the newly formed state authorities. Postwar migrations pertained to resettlement of Poles from beyond the Bug river, displacement of Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians, Lithuanians and Soviet Union citizens, displacement of Germans (especially from the Recovered Territories), resettlement of people from central provinces to the Recovered Territories, resettlement of Poles and other nationals from beyond the eastern border due to the boundary delimitation between Poland and the USSR (in 1946 and 1948) and resettlement of Ukrainians under the "Wisła" initiative. Furthermore, there occurred repatriation and re-emigration of Poles (refugees and prisoners) from the USSR, Germany, Czechoslovakia, France and other countries, including as remote ones as Manchuria from where 784 people returned after having stayed there in the interwar period²⁶.

In order to coordinate repatriation and resettlement, on 7 October 1944 the Polish Committee of National Liberation issued a decree that established the National Repatriation Office (Polish abbreviation: PUR) and its first director was Władysław Wolski. The key

²³ KERSTEN, K., *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej. Studium historyczne*, Wrocław 1974, p. 72.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 90.

²⁵ See: Ibidem, p. 170ff.

²⁶ Issues related to postwar repatriation are discussed in D. SULA's *Działalność przesiedleńczo-repatriacyjna Państwowego Urzędu Repatriacyjnego w latach 1944–1951*, Lublin 2002; see also: BANASIAK, S., *Działalność osad*, 963; KERSTEN, K., op. cit.; GIESZCZYŃSKI, W., *Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny w osadnictwie na Warmii i Mazurach (1945–1950)*, Olsztyn 1999; POGORZELSKI, W., *Służba Zdrowia Państwowego Urzędu Repatriacyjnego (1945–1948)*, Łódź 1948.

task of PUR was to effectively relocate several million people as well as to provide sanitary care and food²⁷. Other organisations also contributed. Aiming at better aid to repatriates from Germany, on 30 June 1945 the Ministry of Public Administration issued the Circular No. 22 which entrusted the full responsibility for repatriation from the West to the National Repatriation Office (PUR). Temporary aid was to be provided by security authorities, the army, orderlies, physicians and aid organisations. The support that had been offered by the Central Committee of Social Welfare (Polish abbreviation: CKOS) and the Polish Red Cross as well as other institutions was to be continued under the auspices of PUR²⁸.

Repatriates and migrants moved across a dense network of stage points, mainly in locations with railway stations, where they received the necessary aid. From the authorities' perspective, the entrance locations were of utmost importance. They were supposed make a good impression, so they had welcoming inscriptions, hot meals and coffee were served. On the other hand, people were put off by strict controls and photographs. The model points often referred to in the press were located in Dziedzice, Szczecin and Międzyzylesie²⁹.

Due to the great number of people flowing through this organised aid system (e.g. in Poznań around 10 000 people were registered daily in May/June 1945; at the transfer point in Mikłuczyce 3–4 thousand people were registered in July 1945), difficulties emerged with respect to insufficient funds, appropriate rooms, physicians, medicines, food etc.³⁰ Eastern repatriates were in a particularly unsettling position. Problems faced by the exhausted people included robberies, corruption (e.g. railway workers collected bribes at each station for moving the train on), brawls and banditry by the Soviet soldiers. Often people travelled in open car along with the cattle without any possibility to wash themselves and the waiting time for the next train at the transfer point could reach even two

²⁷ The PUR formation decree ("Dekret Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego z dnia 7 października 1944 r. o utworzeniu Państwowego Urzędu Repatriacyjnego", *Journal of Laws* 1944, No. 7, item 32) specifies the following scope of PUR's operations:

- "a) organising repatriation from other countries to Poland;
- b) regulating the inflow of repatriates according to plan;
- c) providing sanitary care and food during repatriation;
- d) planned distribution of repatriates and their settlement in Poland;
- e) aid to repatriates with respect to the economic reconstruction of workshops;
- f) supporting unions and social institutions in Poland and abroad if their goals is to provide assistance and relief to repatriates."

6 months later, one more item was added to the list of PUR's competences, i.e. resettlement of Poles in the Recovered Territories; see: "Dekret z dnia 7 maja 1945 r. o częściowej zmianie dekretu Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego z dnia 7 października 1944 r. o utworzeniu Państwowego Urzędu Repatriacyjnego", *Journal of Laws* 1944, No. 7, item 32.

In spring 1945, the tasks of PUR were limited to organising transport of migrants inside the country and providing them with social care.

²⁸ *Okólnik nr 22 Ministra Administracji Publicznej z dn. 30 czerwca 1945*, Nr dz. I Og.9347/45, Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Centralny Komitet Opieki Społecznej (CKOS), sygn. 112, k. 617–618.

²⁹ SULA, D., *Działalność przesiedleńczo-repatriacyjna*, op. cit., p. 41.

³⁰ *Protokół z posiedzenia w sprawie pomocy dla powracających z Niemiec z dnia 2 czerwca 1945*, AAN, CKOS, sygn. 112, k. 581–583.

weeks. On the other hand, people coming from the American occupation zone in Germany were in the best situation, since they got well provided by the UNRRA upon departure and when they reached Dziedzice, they went straight to the UNRRA facility where they received food for two months³¹.

In order to coordinate aid provided to former prisoners of concentration camps and labour camps, the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Relief to Persons Released from the Nazi Camps was established³². Its task was to collaborate with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Polish abbreviation: MPiOS) in helping all people returning from Germany (expressly excluding German citizens), i.e. former prisoners of concentration camps and labour camps, war prisoners and other war victims. The operations were managed by three large social organizations: the Central Committee of Social Welfare (Polish: CKOS), the Polish Red Cross (Polish: PCK) and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Polish: CKŻP). PCK was in the avant guard, organising facilities very close to the front line in order to ensure registration, first aid, referral for hospitalisation, food provisioning and organising transport to one of the assembly points managed by CKOS in the larger Polish cities. At the assembly points, records were filled with testimonies on German crimes and basic information was given. The aid included food (special dietary cuisine for people returning from camps), clothes and accommodation for the night. The PCK sanitary section was also available. People were then directed from assembly points to their family homes, while repatriates from eastern parts that were no longer within the Polish borders were sent to their new places of settlement. People who required care were moved to hospitals, care centres, sanatoriums, recreation centres etc. War prisoners were conveyed to the Red Army or the Polish Army. There were separate assembly points for foreigners who were helped on their way to their respective homelands. Jews were directed to CKŻP³³.

The boundaries shifted, so it was necessary to resettle care home residents from beyond the Bug river. The scale of operation carried on from spring 1946 is confirmed by figures: three thousand care home residents were moved from Lviv in 1946, while two thousand mothers with children were transferred from Vilnius. MPiOS prepared a network of facilities usually located in the buildings of post-German care centres in the then province of Lower Silesia (majority) and West Pomeranian, Pomeranian, Gdańsk and Mazury provinces where the National Repatriation Office (PUR) intended to move the migrants. Most facilities had no personnel, there was a manager or administrator in some of them, while others had secular or monastic personnel³⁴. At the same time, German care homes were displaced from the Recovered Territories. Residents and employees could take only some

³¹ SULA, D., op. cit., pp 39–44.

³² *Opieka Społeczna 1944–1947*, Wydawnictwo MPiOS, [1948], AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 2/402/0/263, p. 15.

³³ *Uchwała Rady Ministrów Rządu Tymczasowego RP w przedmiocie opieki nad powracającymi z obozów hitlerowskich*, 26 maja 1945, AAN, CKOS, sygn. 112, k. 563–564; *Pismo MKOZOH do Rady Ministrów* [no date], AAN, CKOS, sygn. 112, k. 570–573; *Organizacja akcji przyjmowania przybywających z obozów hitlerowskich*, AAN, CKOS, sygn. 112, k. 575–578.

³⁴ Korespondencja PUR z MPiOS, AAN, MPiOS 392, k. 37ff.

part of the amenities with them (resettled care homes from beyond the Bug river arrived with no amenities or equipment from the original locations)³⁵.

In the postwar intensification of railway traffic, many pregnant women and mothers with little children travelled on trains. They were aided by means of the Railway Station Houses for Mothers and Children, set up at larger railway nodes which served to facilitate the journey when it was necessary to wait many hours for the transfer train (it was allowed to spend 24 hours at the house) and to provide a ticket for the next leg of the journey. The houses usually included a sleeping room for the children and a canteen. The services were usually provided free of charge (sometimes it was necessary to pay for the meal). The personnel consisted of nurses, social carers and cleaners. The houses were supervised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MPiOS), but they were run by: the League of Women, Caritas and the Polish Red Cross. The 64 houses were closed down in the summer of 1948, since railway transport had improved and life had become more stable³⁶.

It seems necessary to refer to the salaries of PUR employees due to the similarly low remuneration of social welfare personnel in the subsequent decades. Earnings of PUR employees could be several times lower in comparison to officials³⁷ and showed a decreasing tendency. Modest bonuses were not paid regularly and it was easy to lose a bonus due to e.g. an absence at the 1 May procession. Furthermore, in 1946, food allotments and the UNRRA allocations were cancelled, though employees of other offices and institutions continued to receive them. The sense of doing only temporary work was also decreasing motivation, as it was obvious that many job positions will become useless after repatriation and resettlement; to make it even worse, the members of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) looked for conspirators and enemies of the Polish People's Republic among the employees of PUR³⁸.

Aid to children – war victims

It was an urgent necessity to provide care to a huge number of children, including many orphans, who enjoyed no proper living conditions in the aftermath of war. Malnutrition and exhaustion caused high morbidity and mortality due to tuberculosis, so care and assistance was provided to children and pregnant women in the first place³⁹.

³⁵ Pisma Naczelnika Wydziału Nadzoru i Polityki Opiekuńczej M. Rakowskiego z marca 1946, AAN, MPiOS 392, pp. 47ff.

³⁶ Notatki, regulaminy, korespondencja dot. Izb Dworcowych, [in:] *Organizowanie Izb Dworcowych*, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 275.

³⁷ The October 1946 data specify PLN 1,200–3,500 as the range of salaries at PUR, while the earnings of the personnel at the Treasury Office in Szczecin started from PLN 6,000. See: SULA, D., *Działalność przesiedleńczo-repatriacyjna*, op. cit., p. 38.

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 36–39.

³⁹ See: RUTKIEWICZ, J., "Opieka nad dzieckiem i matką w stolicy", *Opiekun Społeczny* 1946/3–4, pp. 6–11.

During the war, many families were broken apart: children were separated from their parents and lived outside Poland (mainly in Germany and the USSR) or parents were dead, in prison or in a labour camp. The impact of the war on the youngest generation is seen clearly in statistical data: the percentage of children in the entire population in 1939 was 42%, while in 1947 it dropped to 33%⁴⁰. One of the key tasks of social care and assistance service was to ensure reunification of families and allow them to start functioning normally⁴¹.

Despite the efforts, orphanhood became a significant problem in postwar Poland. The school census in 1945 indicated that among 7 million children 22% had lost a family member (i.e. more than 1.5 million)⁴², of which 140 thousand had lost both parents. One of the forms of providing assistance to orphans was to send them outside war destruction areas to care facilities and foster families. This was the fate of children from Warsaw to the greatest extent and this practice was continued until the end of the 1950s⁴³. Official data mention 73 thousand children sent to foster families by 1947 and in the first place families were sought for the youngest children kept in orphanages⁴⁴.

State authorities were having difficult time coping with such a great number of children that needed care. At the session of the State National Council in December 1945, Stanisława Garnarczykowa mentioned the lack of proper actions by the state regarding the issue of orphans who were often starving, forced to beg and take up trade, which made them socially derailed. No interest shown by the state authorities in the problem of children (she claimed) often leads to deaths. The situation was disastrous in the countryside where 80% of children lived: “in a poor country family, a child knows nothing about sugar, fat or even milk. Thousands of villagers live in bunkers or dugouts. (...) Households with no horses or cows are not infrequent in the countryside today (...). Children have no clothes and no footwear, so they cannot go to school”⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ *Opieka Społeczna 1944–1947*, op. cit., p. 59.

⁴¹ KĘPSKI, C., *Idea miłosierdzia a dobroczynność i opieka*, Lublin 2003, p. 127.

⁴² KELM, A., “Opieka nad dziećmi i młodzieżą w Polsce Ludowej”, *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 1964/3, p. 96. The same figure is referred to in *Opieka Społeczna 1944–1947...*, p. 59. A lower number (1.1 million) was specified by Jan Stańczyk, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, in a letter of 9 April 1946 addressed to Katarzyna Kozik, Director General of the Soldier’s Mothers Association, in relation to the UNRRA Council session in Atlantic City in 1946 (AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 100, pp. 5–6). Different figures (300 thousand orphans and 1.5 million half-orphans) were also mentioned by Stanisława Garnarczykowa, member of the board of the Social and Civic League of Women, in a speech for the State National Council on 30 December 1945; see: *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Krajowej Rady Narodowej w dn. 29, 30 i 31 grudnia 1945 r. oraz w dn. 2 i 3 stycznia 1946 r.*, Warszawa 1946, p. 157.

⁴³ KELM, A., *Formy opieki nad dzieckiem w Polsce Ludowej*, Warszawa 1983, p. 89.

⁴⁴ *Opieka Społeczna 1944–1947*, op. cit., p. 61.

⁴⁵ *Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z posiedzeń Krajowej Rady Narodowej w dn. 29, 30 i 31 grudnia 1945 r. oraz w dn. 2 i 3 stycznia 1946 r.*, op. cit., p. 157–158.

A special care was required for children who had been subject to Germanisation during the war, especially for those out of 200 thousand⁴⁶ who managed to return to Poland. The fate of Polish children could be varied: some were forced to work in camps from minors, some girls became domestic servants, while others were sent to facilities or given away to German families. Among the children who were brought back the youngest ones and those who had been with foster families spoke almost no Polish and some of them, when asked about their nationality, answered: "Ich bin Deutscher"⁴⁷. Adolescents (14–15 years old) were often demoralised: they stole, consumed alcohol, escaped from care centres or had venereal diseases; some girls were or had been pregnant, some miscarried, and there were also kids with disabilities⁴⁸. Children returning from Germany were first brought to the repatriation and care facilities where they were registered and examined by physicians, and they awaited to be picked up by their family or were sent to care centres. Polonisation was practised in relation to children who had lost their parents in the war and lived in the Recovered Territories⁴⁹. Many organisations, including the Church, participated in the lost children registration campaign; in March 1948, Stefan Wyszyński, a bishop of Lublin, addressed the priests in his diocese, asking them to urge the parishioners to provide information about children taken away to Germany, "so that we can bring back our Polish children, condemned to Germanisation, and maybe even to the loss of our holy faith"⁵⁰.

The organisations that played the key role in the rescue operations included Caritas, the Peasants' Society of Friends of Children, the Workers' Society of Friends of Children, the Polish Red Cross and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. A special care was provided to children and adolescents. Postwar reports of these organisations indicate they often worked together to give help.

Caritas looked after children in full/partial care facilities and supplied food to schools in the areas destroyed during the war. It was also responsible for railway station houses (missions), assistance to mothers and organisation of summer play centres. This organisation also placed orphans at foster families, trying to provide assistance to the accepting families as well⁵¹.

⁴⁶ This number of lost children was recorded by the Polish Red Cross and mentioned in a letter of 18 March 1949 addressed to the General Plenipotentiary of the Government for Repatriation, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 373, k. 251.

⁴⁷ SADULSKA, J., *Moja praca wychowawcza w Lubece*, p. 24, Maszynopis ze zbiorów Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku, sygn. VII-810, quoted in: *Źródła do pedagogiki społecznej*, vol. II, ed. I. LEPALCZYK, Warszawa 1988, p. 483; *Germanizacja, deportacja i eksterminacja dzieci polskich* [a part of a larger work, no title page, no author], AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 373, k. 153–155.

⁴⁸ JEDRZEJOWSKA, J., Pismo do Gabinetu Ministra Pracy i Opieki Społecznej z dn. 24 kwietnia 1948, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 373, k. 91; MAROSZ, J., WODZINOWSKA, M., *Sprawozdanie z pobytu w Okręgu Śląsko-Dąbrowskim PCK w Katowicach*, 1948, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 373, k. 119–129.

⁴⁹ *Źródła do pedagogiki społecznej*, vol. II, ed. I. Lepalczyk, Warszawa 1988, p. 483

⁵⁰ WYSZYŃSKI, S., "W sprawie wywiezionych podczas wojny dzieci Zamojszczyzny", *Wiadomości Diecezjalne Lubelskie* 1948/3, p. 111.

⁵¹ MAJKA, J., *Sprawozdanie, plany, potrzeby Organizacji Caritas w akcji opiekuńczej nad dziećmi i młodzieżą*, 1946, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 251, k. 93–94.

The Polish Red Cross was also one of the largest social organisations that helped children. In 1946, it ran 21 orphanages and 2 dormitories and it also carried out the supplementary food provisions. 56 kitchens served 100 thousand meals per month and food was also supplied to remote villages. The supplies included clothes for children, bottles of cod-liver oil, cans of nutrients and condensed milk as part of the children feeding initiative called “Kropla mleka” (A drop of milk). In the summer, some children could go to camps, sanatoriums and TB preventoria. Red Cross organisations from other countries that joined the aid campaign included e.g. Switzerland, the United States, Denmark, Bulgaria and Sweden⁵². The Polish Red Cross also ran care stations for mothers and children, sanitary and feeding points and medical points that provided relief and assistance to repatriate mothers as well as wives and babies after dead or lost soldiers. It also operated several dozen canteens providing a whole-day menu to 2 thousand children as well as playrooms and summer play centres. The Polish Red Cross was responsible for providing care to 15 thousand children transferred from the USSR in the spring of 1946⁵³.

The Workers’ Society of Friends of Children, reactivated in 1944 in Lublin, focused on immediate aid to children who were war victims, prioritizing those who were left without any family⁵⁴. The Peasants’ Society of Friends of Children (established in January 1946) also provided ad hoc assistance to the youngest. The Society opened sanitary points for several dozen thousand of children from village communes where no other help could reach. In addition to feeding and first sanitary aid, large-scale actions were taken against lice and scabies⁵⁵.

The Central Department for Childcare at the Central Committee of Jews in Poland provided care to the youngest Jewish survivors whose total number was estimated at 6 thousand in 1946. Due to the extremely difficult situation of those children who were usually orphans or their parents had no means to get by, the assistance consisted in providing full care in closed facilities. In addition, semi-open and open care was also organised in the form of allowances, grants and food⁵⁶.

Activity of foreign organisations

An important element of social care and assistance was the help received from outside Poland. It was provided by governments of numerous countries as well as foreign charity associations.

⁵² H.D., “Polski Czerwony Krzyż w trosce o dziecko”, *Opiekun Społeczny* 1946/5–6, pp. 59–60.

⁵³ LENK, H., *Sprawozdanie z działalności PCK w zakresie opieki nad dzieckiem dla Podkomitetu Pomocy Dzieciom i Młodzieży z 6 marca 1946*, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 251, k. 95.

⁵⁴ BALCEREK, M., *Historyczny rozwój tendencji wychowawczych TPD*, [in:] *Pedagogika Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Dzieci*, eds. B. BUTRYMOWICZ, L. GOMÓŁKA, pp. 41–42.

⁵⁵ *Plan pracy Chłopskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Dzieci w zakresie opieki nad dziećmi na terenach zniszczonych*, 1946, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 251, k. 96–97.

⁵⁶ *Sprawozdanie z działalności Centralnego Wydziału Opieki nad Dzieckiem przy CKŻP*, 1946, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 251, k. 98–100.

One of the international organisations aiding Poles in the postwar period was the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), established in 1943 upon the initiative of the United States (the major contributor), Great Britain, the USSR and China. Its goal was to help countries that suffered most during the war. The organisation was established by the United Nations General Assembly and its initiator as well as the first president was a Pole, Ludwik Rajchman, a younger brother of Helena Radlińska.

The UNRRA campaign in Poland started at the end of June 1945 and covered various types of aid (data until December 1946):

- providing people with clothes (as well as footwear, blankets, quilts etc.) – the UNRRA supplied more than 13,000 tons of such items;

- food (5,500 tons); food distribution was carried out to care facilities and commonly available canteens in the first place, and then to mothers with children, repatriates and people affected by natural disasters;

- 8.2 tons of seeds and 5 tractors were supplied to the agricultural centres of MPiOS;
- 75 carriages of kitchen equipment (including equipment left after the demobilisation of the American army) provided to commonly available canteens and care facilities;

- sewing machines (144 items), shoemaker's tools (476 sets) – provided to training facilities;

- soap and toys – supplied to care facilities⁵⁷.

All these items were distributed by such institutions as MPiOS, PUR, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health.

The intrinsic value of the items received from foreign organisations, excluding the cost of labour related to management and distribution, reached nearly USD 37 million in 1946⁵⁸.

As part of the UNRRA's aid to Poland in 1945, 315 thousand tons of supplies were delivered: food (nearly a half of the total), clothes, fabrics and medicines as well as equipment necessary to rebuild the industrial sector (500 lorries, 11 locomotives, phone devices and mining equipment), agricultural machines (3.5 thousand tractors, fertilizers, dairy cows, horses, seeds). Additionally, provided sanitary devices allowed to equip 241 hospitals⁵⁹.

Sometimes, distribution of the UNRRA gifts involved abuses. It so happened that the lack of the UNRRA's packages or giving food vouchers to employees instead of salaries was one of the reasons for going on strike⁶⁰. It seems understandable, since many strikes in the first years after the war (1945–1946) were caused directly by the shortage of food. Moreover, offences related to the UNRRA's aid resulted in sending more than 100 people

⁵⁷ *Pomoc zagraniczna* (materiały Komitetu dla Koordynacji Zagranicznej Akcji Pomocy), AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 251, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁸ *Pomoc zagraniczna*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁵⁹ "Co nam dotychczas dała UNRRA?", *Wola Ludu* 1948/21, p. 2.

⁶⁰ See: *Strajki w Zakładach pracy, sprawozdania, protokoły, zestawienia statystyczne, notatki, korespondencja. 1945–1946*, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 803, p. 1, 2, 83, 161, 185.

to labour camps by the Special Commission for Combating Abuses and Harmful Economy in 1946–1947⁶¹.

The urgent needs, especially in terms of food, made the Polish government undertake energetic steps internationally to obtain a prolongation of the UNRRA's mission at least in 1947⁶², but it did not happen, since the organisation ended its European programme on 31 December 1946, transferring its agencies to international charity organisations.

The value of the UNRRA's aid to all countries reached nearly USD 3 billion with the value of USD being then ten times lower than currently. Comparing European countries, Poland was the top beneficiary (USD 481 million), followed by Hungary and Italy (420 million each), Greece (350 million) and Czechoslovakia (264 million)⁶³.

In 1947, when the UNRRA ceased its mission, the Council of Voluntary Associations was established. The Council consisted of more than twenty entities, but two of them contributed the major share of support: the American Relief for Poland and the American Red Cross⁶⁴.

The 1946 data provide specific information on the foreign organisations that supported Poland in the postwar recovery. It is worth noting the diversity of the aid. The key role was played by the following organisations:

– **American Relief for Poland** – the Council Polish Americans which represented a number of social organisations from across the ocean delivered clothes, footwear, medicines, sanitary materials, hospital supplies etc. as from the end of 1945. It was distributed through large organisations: Caritas, CKOS, YMCA; the estimated value of the annual aid reached nearly USD 10 million⁶⁵;

– **Swedish Committee for International Relief** – the Committee was a collaboration platform for several organisations that provided aid to Poland and its annual value was USD 4.8 million; the Committee was one of the first organisations to start helping as early as 1944; it run an extensive campaign that covered equipping hospitals and opening new facilities; the Committee's activity stood behind such initiatives as the children sanatorium in Otwock, the preventorium in Dzierżążno and the assistance centre in Wrzeszcz. Additionally, the Committee delivered large amounts of items essential in childcare, e.g. powdered milk, cod-liver oil and clothes⁶⁶;

⁶¹ *Komisja Specjalna do Walki z Nadużyciami i Szkodnictwem Gospodarczym 1945–1954. Wybór dokumentów*, eds. D. JAROCH, T. WOLSZA, Warszawa 1995, p. 9.

⁶² *Uchwała Podkomitetu dla Międzynarodowych Spraw Gospodarczych z dn. 27 lutego 1946 w sprawie wytycznych dla Delegacji na IV Sesję Rady UNRRA w Atlantic City*, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 100, p. 192.

⁶³ GARLICKI, A., "Pieniądze za kurtyną. Plan Marshalla. Jak 55 lat temu nie weszliśmy do Europy", *Polityka* 2002/22, pp. 44–45.

⁶⁴ *Estimated value of programme excluding administrative costs, Działalność zagranicznych towarzystw charytatywnych*, AAN, MPiOS, sygn. 501, no page numbers.

⁶⁵ The amounts pertain to the aid in 1946 and do not include administrative costs. *Pomoc zagraniczna*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

– **American Red Cross** – the American Red Cross collaborated directly with the Polish Red Cross, at the beginning of 1946, it launched large-scale deliveries of medicines, dressing materials, surgical tools as well as clothes and food; the youth of the American Red Cross supported Polish children by sending them school accessories, soap and sweets⁶⁷;

– **American Joint Distribution Committee** (abbreviated: **Joint**) – the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee whose annual aid reached USD 3.6 million; it provided assistance mainly to Jewish people and delivered food, hospital equipment, clothes, footwear as well as tools and machines necessary to rebuild production plants; Joint participated in the Polandwide campaigns to help children and provided regular support to monasteries that had rescued Jewish children during the war⁶⁸;

– **War Relief Services** – National Catholic Welfare Conference – with the help of Polish Caritas it distributed food, clothes and medicines across Poland; 4,500 tons of items with the total value of USD 3.6 million were supplied⁶⁹;

– **Don Suisse** – the Swiss relief for the victims of the war operated in Poland from December 1945. This organisation helped children, e.g. it build and ran “Wioska Dziecięca” (Children’s Village) in Otwock as well as supported the program of summer camps; the Swiss also helped to organise hospital equipment and they provided and distributed items of clothing and veterinary tools; the value of the aid was estimated at USD 1.7 million;

– **Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE)** – the cooperative of American shipments to Europe brought food packages purchased in the U.S. By private individuals or organisations and then delivered them directly to particular needy people in Poland or entities engaged in assistance and care; in 1946 around 100,000 packages landed in Poland with the total value of USD 1.3 million⁷⁰;

– **International Committee of the Red Cross** – as early as September 1945, the Committee, by the agency of the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross, started delivering Red Cross donations from many countries to civilian victims of the war; the value of the aid was estimated at USD 1.2 million⁷¹;

– **International Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA)** – this ecumenical organisation carried out deliveries via the Polish branch of YMCA; their assistance was critical during the winter feeding of school children; the value of the aid reached USD 1.1 million⁷²;

In addition to large-scale aid, international support also came through smaller organisational forms, e.g. some organisations selected specific locations – the Anglo-American

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 3.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁷² Ibidem.

Quaker Relief Mission provided assistance to people in the Koziernice district; the Danish Red Cross and the Danish Save the Children Fund organized feeding campaigns and provided medical aid to people in Gdańsk, Ostróda, Pułtusk, Maków (in the Warsaw province) and other places⁷³); the British Save the Children Fund run a nutritional programme in Nieporęt (in the Warsaw province) and adjacent villages⁷⁴.

The shortage of closed care facilities, especially for children, motivated the idea to “adopt” specific locations – Polish Americans looked after several orphanages⁷⁵, the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists provided regular support to the orphanage in Bielsko⁷⁶, the Baptist Relief for Poland took care of the orphanages in Malbork and Szczytno⁷⁷. Some of the foreign organisations had their locations or branches in Poland, especially in severely destroyed areas where they supplied food (particularly to children), garments and medicines. These facilities employed qualified medical staff and social workers⁷⁸.

Foreign organisations also made it possible to take a trip and spend some restful time outside Poland. Children were thus sent to some Western countries, e.g. Denmark, Switzerland and Norway. The World Student Relief helped the academic environments, but also organised foreign excursions for students and professors with the goal of resting, studying or treating⁷⁹.

The aid could take on extremely individual forms, e.g. private individuals from the West could participate in the “Godfathers” initiative and regularly send packages to individual kids⁸⁰.

In conclusion, the social response in Poland after the cease of military operations was an enormous and joint effort of the authorities and numerous national and foreign social organisations that actively helped the country devastated by the horrors of war. However, the organisational experience as well as the mobilisation and inclusion of volunteers in the process were not seen as useful and beneficial after 1948. The socialist order imposed on Poland assumed that social problems typical of capitalism would disappear within several years, therefore the organisations whose core activity was to solve such problems were deemed useless and soon dismantled.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁷⁵ “Kronika”, *Dzieci i Wychowawca* 1946/2, p. 45.

⁷⁶ *Pomoc zagraniczna...*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, pp. 6–7.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, pp. 2–3.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, pp. 3–4.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 3.

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