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# FROM THE HISTORICAL CALENDAR

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## **100 years of the social assistance system in Poland**

### **Abstract**

The aim of the article is an attempt to sum up the past 100 years of functioning of the social assistance system in Poland, starting from its creation with the rebirth of statehood in 1918. The transformations that took place during that time allow us to distinguish three consecutive stages in the history of Polish social assistance. The first one was the interwar period, when efforts were made to build a social welfare system in reborn Poland, on the lands previously belonging to three partitioning states, each with a different social security system. The second period were the years of the People's Republic of Poland (1944–1989), when the communist authorities liquidated the foundations of the social welfare system created before the war, based on the cooperation of state entities with social organizations and the Church, instead creating inefficient structures dealing only with selected groups in need. The third stage, which began after 1989 – the reconstruction of social assistance – was initially characterised by social protection of people particularly affected by the consequences of the political transformation. Whereas the last dozen or so years of the development of social assistance has been characterised by a visible stimulation of social and economic development and the activation of people belonging to the margins of society.

**Keywords:** social welfare, social assistance, social security, social work, social worker, history of social assistance, social benefits

## Introduction

Research concerning social assistance has never been at the heart of research in the field of Polish social policy. This was due, among other things, to the fact that from the very beginning of the functioning of social assistance, i.e. from the Second Polish Republic, there were voices predicting the imminent disappearance of this institution or the assumption of its role by the dynamically developing social insurance system<sup>1</sup>. The post-war authorities treated the system even worse. During the Stalinist period, social assistance (welfare) was perceived as a relic of capitalist Poland. Today we cannot imagine the social reforms of the 1990s without a protective umbrella in the form of social assistance. What is more, there are voices saying that in the near future, none of the other forms of social protection, apart from the institution of social assistance, are likely to be able to cope with the growing social problems resulting from globalisation or neoliberal economy<sup>2</sup>.

Social assistance (until the 1990s formally: social welfare) has been functioning in Poland for almost a hundred years. It could be assumed that it is a mature institution. However, the specific character of social assistance – including its role in the social and economic sphere – has made the basic assumptions underlying the system undergo radical changes, responding to social needs in varying degrees. The aim of this text is to explain the history of the institution of social welfare and social assistance in the last hundred years. Subsequent parts of the article will be devoted first to the characteristics of social welfare in the interwar period and the People's Republic of Poland, and then to social assistance institutions in the Third Polish Republic.

### The period of the Second Polish Republic

When Poland regained independence in 1918, many institutions characteristic for modern, 20th-century countries were created. One of them was social welfare. However, the creation of this system was complicated. There was no uniform basis for organising a system of care – during the period of partition of Poland, social policy was implemented in different ways<sup>3</sup>. What is important, the newly created state had to respond to care

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<sup>1</sup> cf. SZURGACZ, H., *Wstęp do prawa pomocy społecznej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1992, p. 7 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> cf. CHACZKO, K., "Efektywność w zmienności? O roli pomocy społecznej w dobie nowych ryzyk społecznych", *Rocznik Administracji Publicznej* 2017, No. 3, pp. 294–308.

<sup>3</sup> In the Russian partition, state social welfare was practically non-existent, which resulted in the fact that tasks in this area were taken over by social and philanthropic organizations. In the Austrian partition, the obligation to help the inhabitants of communes was theoretically implemented on the principle of subsidiarity, but the majority of tasks were carried out by non-governmental entities. Only the inhabitants of the areas under Prussian rule could count on organized care, which was part of a well thought-out social policy of the state. cf. ZALEWSKI, D., *Opieka i pomoc społeczna. Dynamika instytucji*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 2005; KRZYWICKI, L. (ed.), *Służba społeczna w Polsce*, Wydawnictwo Związku Spółdzielni Spożywców R. P., Warsaw 1928.

needs resulting from the First World War on an ongoing basis. The support of the society, including social organizations, which took over some of the tasks in the field of assistance provided to the needy, was particularly important in this aspect. The first post-war years were devoted mainly to mitigating the most urgent consequences of the war (with the focus on the quantitative aspect), and the creation of a formal system began after 1920<sup>4</sup>. At that time, the tasks of the Main Welfare Council – an institution coordinating aid actions, established with the consent of the occupants during the war – were taken over by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare<sup>5</sup>.

The basis of the constructed welfare system was the *Act of 16 August 1923 on social welfare*. It should be noted, however, that during the interwar period the provisions of the said Act did not apply in the Silesian Voivodship, while in the Poznań and Pomeranian Voivodships the provisions of Prussian legislation were applied for most of the period of the Second Polish Republic – Polish legislation was inspired by them in several aspects<sup>6</sup>. The Social Welfare Act of 1923 was a framework document, which in subsequent years was supplemented by legal acts regulating, among other things, the functioning of care institutions (1927)<sup>7</sup> or social services (1928–1929)<sup>8</sup>.

The social welfare system in the interwar period focused on the implementation of two basic objectives, expressed in the first article of the Act. They were: “satisfying, with the use of public funds, the essential life needs of persons who could not do it with their own material means or with their own work, permanently or temporarily” and “preventing the creation of the situation defined above”<sup>9</sup>. In this context, it is important to draw attention to the issue of the public nature of care, the definition of its scope and beneficiaries, and the issue of prevention.

The public character of social welfare distinguished it from philanthropic support, i.e. voluntary and private support. As a result, “new conditions were created in the environment of social care and social assistance, in which the rules for the acquisition of specific social benefits were not burdened with the ‘sin’ of discretion and locality characteristic

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<sup>4</sup> BOMSTEIN-ŁYCHOWSKA, M. (ed.), *Polityka społeczna państwa Polskiego 1918–1935*, Ministry of Social Welfare, Warsaw 1935, p. 292.

<sup>5</sup> BOŁDYREW, A., SOSNOWSKA, J., “Troska o dziecko i jego potrzeby w działaniach Wydziału Opieki Społecznej Zarządu Miasta Łodzi w okresie międzywojennym”, *Kultura i Wychowanie* 2014, No. 8, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> cf. BRENK, M., “Minęło 90 lat od uchwalenia Ustawy o opiece społecznej w Polsce”, *Praca Socjalna* 2014, No. 1.

<sup>7</sup> “Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 22 April 1927 on supervision and control over the activity of care institutions”, *Journal of Laws* 1927, No. 40 item 354, together with regulations on the qualifications of managers (*Journal of Laws* 1927, No. 100 item 867) and on the rules and regulations of care institutions (*Journal of Laws* 1927, No. 100 item 866).

<sup>8</sup> “Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 6 March 1928 on social carers and social welfare commissions”, *Journal of Laws* 1928, No. 29 item 267 and “Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of 11 April 1929 issued in consultation with the Minister of the Interior on the appointment of social carers and the manner of performing their duties”, *Journal of Laws* 1929, No. 30 item 291.

<sup>9</sup> “Act of 16 August 1923 on social welfare”, *Journal of Laws* 1923, No. 92 item 726, Art. 1.

for traditional forms of support provided to people in need of public care”<sup>10</sup>. It should be noted, however, that the care system was created as a supplement to the social security system. For this reason, it was addressed mainly to those who were not covered by insurance at that time, i.e. children and mothers with children, the unemployed, invalids and the elderly.<sup>11</sup> However, the organisation of a system that provided relatively universal access can be considered as a step towards building social citizenship. Essential life needs were defined in subsequent paragraphs of the Act and created a kind of catalogue, a basket of goods and services defining the scope of care. It consisted of: providing goods necessary for biological functioning (food, clothing, hygiene, housing), educational activities directed at children and youth, activities related to functioning on the labour market (help in obtaining work tools, as well as in restoring or improving the ability to work) and organizing funerals<sup>12</sup>. It should be stressed, however, that the very dimension of support was to be limited to a minimum. The issue of prevention, the last element of the characteristic of the system’s objectives, clearly indicates the systemic character of care, which was to focus not only on responding to emerging social problems, but also on their prevention, which indicates a rather holistic – at least in the context of the assumptions – character of the designed system.

The citizen was entitled to services and benefits after a year’s stay in a given municipality (it was also granted to the spouse and children up to the age of 16). But it was also possible to obtain support while staying outside the municipality of permanent residence – then the municipality had the right to apply for reimbursement of the costs incurred from the municipality where the citizen had a permanent right to care. In practice, however, it was complicated: in 1938 Jan Starczewski observed that “municipalities try to defend themselves against the costs of temporary care, which in reality (...) lost the features of «temporality». Unfortunately, this is taking place more and more often in a manner that violates the applicable regulations – namely, municipalities send the needy to the municipality from where they came from, without dealing with any previous correspondence”<sup>13</sup>.

Individual obligations in the scope of implementation of the tasks indicated in the Act were delegated mainly to municipalities and – in part – to districts. Theoretically, the system was to operate on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity: municipalities were to deal with non-institutional and institutional care within the scope of their capabilities, while districts were to supplement municipal care and run institutions covering the whole district<sup>14</sup>. Self-governments at the voivodship level were to play an important role, especially

<sup>10</sup> ZALEWSKI, D., op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> GRATA, P., *Polityka społeczna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Uwarunkowania – instytucje – działania*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, Rzeszów 2013, p. 218.

<sup>12</sup> “Act of 16 August 1923 on social welfare”, op. cit., Art. 3.

<sup>13</sup> STARCZEWSKI, J., “Ustawodawstwo o opiece społecznej w Polsce”, *Opiekun społeczny* 1938, No. 10 (25), pp. 6–7.

<sup>14</sup> Non-institutional (open) care was to be provided without changing the environment of the aid beneficiary, mainly through material benefits and counselling. This form of care was used to run, among other things, counselling centres, day nurseries, security services, food stations and night shelters. Institutional (closed) care

in the scope of organizing institutional care exceeding the financial capabilities of the districts and coordination of the system<sup>15</sup>. However, until 1939 they functioned only in three voivodships: Silesian, Poznań and Pomeranian<sup>16</sup>. As a result, the majority of tasks were assigned to municipalities, where social carers, established by the regulation of 1928, carried out their duties on an honorary basis (i.e. free of charge)<sup>17</sup>. Social welfare commissions were set up in the municipalities and districts, which together with local authorities organized and coordinated the local welfare system. The duties of a carer included: 1) constant monitoring of care needs in the area assigned to the carer, 2) examination of the material and social status of the person to be supported, 3) control of persons benefiting from care, 4) advice on obtaining external support and 5) possible payment of cash benefits.<sup>18</sup> Initially, the institution of a social carer developed quite intensively. However, at the end of the 1930s their number started to decrease – from 23.6 thousand in 1932 to 21.6 thousand in 1938<sup>19</sup>. Paweł Grata sees the reasons for this state of affairs both in the limitation of spending on social purposes and in the “inefficient” work of the carers themselves<sup>20</sup>.

An important part of care “services” was provided by non-governmental entities, such as associations, foundations, religious congregations or religious associations. This was a consequence of both the historical past (including the period of partitions), as well as the institutional deficiencies of the still young state. These entities played a significant role in the organization of the so-called closed, institutional childcare (mainly orphanages, crèches and dormitories). In the second half of the 1930s, associations and foundations ran about 65% of such institutions, while religious organisations – over 21%. Nevertheless, it should be noted that e.g. in 1935, about 38% of places in all closed institutions for children were paid from the central and local government budget<sup>21</sup>. The state was more engaged in running closed institutions for adults, but also in this case social organizations constituted

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was characterized by the transfer of the needy outside their environment to specially organized centers such as: shelters for children (orphanages), nursing homes, workhouses, forced labour homes. Source: BORNSTEIN-ŁYCHOWSKA, M. (ed.), op. cit., pp. 292–293; *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1930*, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 1930, pp. 116–117.

<sup>15</sup> “Act of 16 August 1923 on social welfare”, op. cit., Art. 5.

<sup>16</sup> cf. BABIAK, J., PTAK, A., *Samorząd terytorialny w II RP*, in: BABIAK J., PTAK A. (ed.), *Władza lokalna w procesie transformacji systemowej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Politycznych i Dziennikarstwa UAM, Kalisz – Poznań 2010, pp. 30–31.

<sup>17</sup> “Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 6 March 1928 on social carers and social welfare commissions”, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> In this context, however, it should be noted that due to the local nature of social welfare organisations in the Second Republic of Poland and regular financial problems of local governments, cash benefits, if any, were usually very low. cf. CHACZKO, K., “Czy w systemie opieki społecznej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej istniały zasiłki pieniężne?”, *Praca Socjalna* 2016, No. 2; CZAKI, T., “Współpraca opiekunów społecznych z Ośrodkami”, *Opiekun Społeczny* 1937, No. 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1939*, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw 1939, p. 288.

<sup>20</sup> GRATA, P., op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>21</sup> *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1939...*, op. cit., p. 289.

a significant part of entities running such institutions, especially in the central, eastern and southern voivodships.

To sum up, the characteristic features of the social welfare system in the interwar period were relocation and a fairly strong socialisation. However, it is difficult to consider these features in a positive context, as the consequences included deep disproportions both in terms of access to the care itself and its quality<sup>22</sup>. Too much depended on the organisation of the care system in a particular municipality and district, including the discretionary work of non-professional social carers, a network of social entities operating in a given area and the general financial condition of the local government. In specialist press of that period, attention was also drawn to the fact that the amendment of social legislation was not as intensive as it was required<sup>23</sup>.

### The period of the People's Republic of Poland

The period of the People's Republic of Poland (1944–1989) is the longest period in the history of social assistance in the past 100 years. It was not a homogenous time for the functioning of the discussed system. We can distinguish at least three periods: after the end of warfare there was an immediate relief operation called social rescue; 1948 is the date of the beginning of the Stalinist period, which had destructive consequences for the social welfare system; and the October 1956 thaw began the time of building social welfare in the conditions of a socialist state.

From 1944, when the territory of today's Poland was gradually liberated from Nazi occupation, social services had been supporting people exhausted by the war in the most basic scope, i.e. satisfying essential needs: nutrition, accommodation, health care, care for dependent persons.<sup>24</sup> This happened in the conditions of serious shortages of personnel, victualling, premises, and at the same time a huge demand of the population exhausted by the war.

An attempt to coordinate post-war social welfare was already made during the period of the self-proclaimed rule of the Polish Committee of National Liberation. In December 1944, the then head of the Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Health, Bolesław Drobner issued a regulation establishing the Central Committee for Social Welfare (CKOS). This Committee operated at the central, voivodship, district and municipal level, and the first material base for its activities were the institutions taken over from the Main Welfare Council, which had previously operated during the occupation<sup>25</sup>. It should be not-

<sup>22</sup> ZALEWSKI, D., op. cit., pp. 81–82.

<sup>23</sup> cf. CHACZKO, K., "Problematyka funkcjonowania systemu opieki społecznej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej w publikacjach czasopisma "Opiekun Społeczny" (1936–1939)", *Praca Socjalna* 2017, No. 4.

<sup>24</sup> WÓDZ, K., *Służby społeczne w Polsce. Geneza, kierunki rozwoju, metody pracy*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 1982, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> MIERNIK, I., *Centralny Komitet Opieki Społecznej 1945–1949. Powstanie i główne etapy działalności*, in: PRZENIOSŁO, M., PRZENIOSŁO, M. (ed.), *Dobroczynność i pomoc społeczna na ziemiach polskich w XIX, XX i na początku XXI wieku*, Vol. 2., Kieleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Kielce 2010, p. 190.

ed, however, that apart from CKOS, there were also other entities involved in supporting several million of Poles requiring immediate assistance, and their activity was very diversified in particular municipalities and cities. At the level of self-governments, social welfare departments were established, new charity and philanthropic organizations were created and pre-war organizations were reborn, the participation of the Church was also of great importance,<sup>26</sup> as well as the activity of entities from outside Poland<sup>27</sup>.

The years 1947–1948 were a time of legitimizing the communist power imposed on Poland. In the case of the reborn social welfare system, just like in other areas of social life, this meant far-reaching changes leading to deconstruction, i.e. the deconstruction of what was achieved with great effort during the post-war rescue operation, as well as the rich pre-war achievements. The authorities naively assumed that with the introduction of economic reforms according to the Soviet model, unemployment would be completely eliminated, and with it all social pathologies that were to be its direct consequence. According to this assumption, social welfare was to disappear due to the lack of beneficiaries, i.e. the unemployed, criminals, prostitutes, alcoholics, beggars, the homeless, etc. All of them were to be forced to work according to the principle publicly proclaimed by the authorities “Those who don’t work don’t eat”.<sup>28</sup> The role of social welfare was reduced only to providing help to the elderly, the seriously ill and the disabled to an extent that made it impossible for them to do any kind of work<sup>29</sup>. With the deconstruction of social welfare structures, the authorities began to abolish most of the non-state forms of support for the needy. This meant that many entities had to discontinue their activities and narrow down their statutory tasks<sup>30</sup>, merging with organisations with a similar activity profile. This was accompanied by the takeover of the assets of the liquidated and transformed organisations for the benefit of the State Treasury and the appointment of persons loyal to the authorities as managers of social organisations. These actions did not omit the Central Welfare Committee established after the war, which was liquidated, as well as the Church’s Caritas, which was taken over by the authorities, which established a new management board<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> cf. ZAMIATAŁA, D., *Caritas. Działalność i likwidacja organizacji 1945–1950*, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 2000, pp. 165–275.

<sup>27</sup> cf. JAROSZ, D., *Zapomniani przyjaciele: zagraniczna pomoc charytatywna w Polsce Ludowej (1945–1949)*, in: MĘDRZECKI, W. (ed.), *Spółczesność Państwo Modernizacja. Studia ofiarowane Januszowi Żarnowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 163–175; BRENK, M., “Działania z zakresu ratownictwa społecznego w Polsce w latach 1944–1948”, *Biuletyn Historii Wychowania* 2014 (32), pp. 132–136.

<sup>28</sup> RUSINEK, K., “Zagadnienia pracy i pomocy społecznej w działalności rad narodowych”, *Praca i Opieka Społeczna* 1950, No. 1/2, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> BALICKA-KOZŁOWSKA, H., “Rozważania o opiece i pomocy społecznej w Polsce ludowej”, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1972, No. 1, p. 118.

<sup>30</sup> For example, the activity of the Polish Red Cross, an organisation with a wide range of activities such as running health centres, was limited to dealing only with training and prevention activities. cf. LEŚ E., *Zarys historii dobroczynności i filantropii w Polsce*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warsaw 2001, p. 103; “Act of 28 October 1948 on social health care institutions and planned economy in health care”, *Journal of Laws* 1948, No. 55 item 434

<sup>31</sup> cf. ZAMIATAŁA, D., op. cit., pp. 285–329.

The legal basis for the functioning of social welfare structures remained unchanged – the Social Welfare Act of 1923 was still in force, and amended only in 1990<sup>32</sup>. In practice, however, the pre-war law had no causal force and the social welfare system was based on successive legal acts regulating specific issues. Already in the first years of the People's Republic of Poland, matters related to childcare were excluded from the social welfare sector and transferred to the competences of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, respectively<sup>33</sup>.

The breakthrough in the history of social welfare in People's Poland was the October 1956 thaw, which allowed for the return of attempts to construct a social welfare system and provide state aid to people in need. However, for decades to come, these actions were taken in conditions of the so-called people's democracy, hence the basic assumptions, for example concerning the control over the aid activities of social organisations, remained unchanged.<sup>34</sup> The specificity of social welfare of a socialist state was, moreover, the exposure of certain groups in need while neglecting others. Therefore, the issue of beggars, the homeless or prostitutes was rarely discussed as these problems were considered troublesome for the perfect system which was being built. At the same time, people over 70 years of age, whose number tripled between 1950 and 1980 became the foreground of the aid system<sup>35</sup>. The value and necessity of support for this professional group was justified ideologically by their long-term professional work for the state.<sup>36</sup>

The concentration of social care tasks on the elderly and people with health and fitness problems (invalids, the disabled) was one of the reasons for combining social care tasks with medical assistance in the broad sense of the word. In 1960, the Minister of Health and Social Welfare was appointed, which, at the central level, began the process of integrating social welfare with health care, which continued for the next decades of the People's Republic of Poland<sup>37</sup>. This was manifested, among other things, in the location of the Social Carer Centre (responsible for many social care tasks) in the local outpa-

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<sup>32</sup> "Act of 29 November 1990 on social assistance", *Journal of Laws* 1990, No. 87 item 506.

<sup>33</sup> The Ministry of Health supervised an extensive network of crèches (for children aged 0–3). On the other hand, the Ministry of Education took over all matters related to the upbringing and care of children aged from 3 to 18. The legal basis for these activities was: the "Act of 7 April 1949 on transferring to the Minister of Education the scope of activities of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare in the field of social welfare for children and youth", *Journal of Laws* of 1949, No. 25 item 17; "the Act of 4 February 1950 on transferring to the Minister of Health the scope of activity of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare in the field of social welfare for children under three years of age and pregnant and breastfeeding women", *Journal of Laws* 1950, No. 6 item 49

<sup>34</sup> ZALEWSKI, D., op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>35</sup> In 1950 there were 784,500 people aged 70 and in 1980 there were 2,341,100. As for the percentage of the population, the rise was slightly smaller and represented 3.1 and 6.6 per cent, respectively. The Central Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook 1970*, Warsaw 1970, p. 37; the Central Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook 1985*, Warsaw 1985, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> KARCEWSKI, M., "Pomoc społeczna w PRL. Stan obecny i perspektywy", *Biuletyn TWWP* 1970, No. 6 (16), p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> OLESZCZYŃSKA, A., *Pracownik socjalny w pomocy społecznej*, Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ, Warsaw 1978, p. 19.



tient clinic, i.e. the Health Care Centre<sup>38</sup>. Unfortunately, the integration of social welfare with health care, instead of improving the system's functioning further complicated the system of benefits. The Social Carer Centres mentioned above were responsible only for diagnosing social problems occurring in the local environment. The decision on the possible granting and form of assistance was taken by a local government official, who indicated persons covered by support in the form of cash benefits, material aid or care services. Therefore, there was no single entity responsible for the diagnosis of needs, indication of the form of assistance, its implementation and supervision over the effectiveness of undertaken measures<sup>39</sup>.

The social welfare personnel in the People's Republic of Poland was not provided with optimal solutions. While in the post-war rescue period there was a large involvement of volunteers gathered around social organizations, in the Stalinist period most of these organizations were effectively eliminated, and the enthusiasm of people ready to engage in the common good was eradicated. These were values that could not be re-established during the entire period of the People's Republic of Poland (the difficulties with engaging Poles in voluntary work were still visible a dozen or so years after the fall of communism). Attempts to re-establish pre-war solutions in the form of social carers performing work free of charge in their local environment turned out to be ineffective<sup>40</sup>. On the other hand, the fact that nationalised social organisations were presented as massive groups of people was the result of propaganda aimed at showing hundreds of thousands of members in annual statistics.<sup>41</sup> This had a real impact on the quality of statutory tasks, which were often one of the elements of the social welfare system (environmental assistance was provided by the Polish Red Cross and the Polish Social Welfare Committee).

An important aspect of the development of professional social services was the professionalisation of the profession of social worker, which began in 1966. It was then that this profession was entered on the list of professions and the first State Schools of Social

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<sup>38</sup> The tasks of the centre included: supervision over living and learning conditions, benefits in the scope of medical and vocational rehabilitation, diagnostics and satisfaction of needs in the scope of environmental social assistance, benefits provided by retirement homes and daytime social assistance homes. "Regulation of the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of 30 June 1975 on the organisation and tasks of health care institutions", *Journal of Laws* 1975, No. 25 item. 134, art. 3.

<sup>39</sup> STARĘGA-PIASEK, J. et al., *Pomoc społeczna w Polsce*. Part 1, Medical Centre for Postgraduate Education, Warsaw 1984, pp. 66–70; PŁĄSEK R., "Przemiany polskiego systemu opieki społecznej w latach 1945–1989", *Profilaktyka Społeczna i Resocjalizacja* 2014, No. 24, p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> *Resolution No. 92 of the Council of Ministers of 5 March 1959 on the appointment of social carers*, M. P. 1959, No. 32 item 145; *Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 5 March 1959 on the appointment of social carers and Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of 27 October 1959 on the scope and mode of operation of social carers*.

<sup>41</sup> An example of a mass social organization of the People's Republic of Poland was the Polish Social Welfare Committee, whose number of members increased from less than 70 thousand in 1960 to nearly 2 million in 1980. The Polish Red Cross was even more numerous and in 1980 had more than 5 million members. The Central Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook 1981*, Warsaw 1981, pp. 29–30.

Workers in Warsaw and Poznań were opened.<sup>42</sup> The “Program for the development of professional social service”, planned for 1975–1990, made it possible to employ graduates of these schools in all district outpatient clinics and municipal health centres, thanks to which the network of qualified social workers could ensure greater accessibility of services and benefits for persons in need in the previously neglected regions (e.g. in the countryside)<sup>43</sup>.

### The period of the Third Polish Republic

The reform of the social welfare system was still considered in the period of the People’s Republic of Poland. In 1986, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare developed the “The Assumptions of the Social Welfare Act”, which due to political reasons could not be implemented. The situation of social welfare significantly changed during the systemic transformation. There is no doubt that “this was determined by the decision to carry out a fundamental economic reform and the conviction of the political elite that it was necessary to create an effective system to mitigate the social consequences of the transformation”<sup>44</sup>. In this context, in March 1989, during the talks at the Round Table, the health subgroup set out the general directions of the social welfare reform and approved the establishment of a social welfare reform subgroup (within the health and social welfare reform team), which was to draw up a proposal for changes<sup>45</sup>. In October 1989, this subgroup presented a draft of the social welfare reform guidelines. This document assumed that a reform of its structures would be carried out by the end of 1990 and that a new law would be adopted in this respect. According to the draft, the new social assistance system was to mitigate the expected negative effects of transformation – “pauperisation of broad social strata, unemployment and expansion of the so-called social pathology”<sup>46</sup>. The project of reforms presented in October 1989 assumed, among other things: the change of the organisational structures of social assistance, i.e. the establishment of municipal, municipal and communal social assistance centres, and at the voivodship level – voivodship social assistance departments; new ways of financing social assistance from budgetary and extra-budgetary resources, with the focus on budgetary resources as the main source of

<sup>42</sup> “Order of the Minister of Education of 4 November 1966. (No. SZ2-0101-48/66) on changing the nomenclature of professions and specialities taught in vocational schools”, *Official Journal of the Ministry of Education* 1966, No. 16 item 193.; cf. BRENK, M., “45 lat zawodu “pracownik socjalny” w Polsce”, *Praca Socjalna* 2012, No. 1; LEPALCZYK, I., MARYNOWICZ-HETKA, E., “Tradycja i sytuacja aktualna w kształceniu pracowników socjalnych w Polsce”, *Praca Socjalna* 1990, No. 1–2, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> OLESZCZYŃSKA, A., op. cit., p. 25; ŁOPATO, J., “Zarys rozwoju pomocy społecznej w Polsce Ludowej”, *Polityka Społeczna* 1987, No. 10, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> KAŻMIERCZAK, T., *Pomoc społeczna*, in: BOKSZAŃSKI, Z. (ed.), *Encyklopedia socjologii*, Vol. 3, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2000, p. 148.

<sup>45</sup> *Porozumienia Okrągłego Stołu*, developed by SALOMONOWICZ, W., Wydawnictwo NSZZ Solidarność Regionu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 1989, pp. 223–224.

<sup>46</sup> “Założenia reformy pomocy społecznej. Projekt z października 1989 roku”, *Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Studia i Dyskusje* 2016, No. 35 (4), p. 175.

financing; development of social assistance personnel by introducing the following social work positions: a social worker, a senior social worker and a social work specialist<sup>47</sup>.

The Prime Minister's, Tadeusz Mazowiecki's, letter of January 1990, addressed to voivodes throughout Poland, was a very important step in the reform of the system and at the same time the basis for establishing new organisational structures in social assistance. The letter "(...) obliged voivodes to present to voivodship national councils draft resolutions on the creation of budgetary units – Voivodship Social Assistance Departments. It recommended that 'local state administration bodies of the basic level' (nowadays, mayors) were submitted with and the national councils were presented with draft resolutions on the creation of an organisational unit – the Social Assistance Centre. These institutions were supposed to integrate elements of 'aid' units so far located in health care centres (social service departments) and in state administration offices (municipal offices or departments for social assistance matters)"<sup>48</sup>.

The transfer, after four decades, of social welfare from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Labour took place on 6 April 1990 by virtue of the Act on the transfer of activities in the field of social assistance to the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. In the spring of 1990, municipal and commune national councils started to establish organisational units in the form of social assistance centres, which took over all tasks in the field of social welfare<sup>49</sup>. The last element of the change was the adoption of the first act on social assistance since the Second Republic of Poland, on 29 November 1990. Piotr Błędowski claims that this Act set a new direction in thinking about social assistance: "(...) social assistance has become an equal element of the social security system. Its tasks go far beyond corrective actions taking into consideration the dysfunctions of other social security sub-systems, including the prevention of situations that may result in the necessity to provide benefits in the future and non-material assistance in solving difficult life situations"<sup>50</sup>.

Referring to the tradition of social welfare and pre-war solutions, the state decided to carry out tasks in the field of social assistance through a combined government and self-government structure, which was financed from the state budget and municipal budgets. Tasks of social assistance were divided into those performed by particular municipalities in their area (own tasks) and those which should be performed and financed by the government administration (tasks delegated to the municipality). The Social Assistance Act of 1990 sanctioned the organisational changes that had been taking place for several months, i.e. the existence of voivodship social assistance departments and social assistance centres. The structure of the social assistance system shaped in this way was

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<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, pp. 179–189.

<sup>48</sup> KANKA, W., "Jak budowała się nowoczesna pomoc społeczna", *Problemy Społeczne* 2010, No. 6, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> NITECKI, S., *Prawo do pomocy społecznej w polskim systemie prawnym*, Wolters Kluwer, Warsaw 2008, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> BŁĘDOWSKI, P., *Rola administracji publicznej w funkcjonowaniu pomocy społecznej*, in: GOLI-NOWSKA, S. (ed.), *Polska bieda II. Kryteria. Ocena. Przeciwdziałanie*, the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, Warsaw 1997, p. 348.

uncomplicated and was based on a network of 2489 social assistance centres in each municipality, supported financially and organisationally at the voivodship level by 49 voivodship social assistance departments (which also ran social assistance homes). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was at the very top of the system. “Social assistance centres were in principle the only providers of social assistance (apart from social assistance homes), although a large part of the tasks were commissioned from the scope of government administration and their implementation was supervised by the voivode through the voivodship social assistance department”<sup>51</sup>.

The institutional changes in the discussed system were accompanied by the evolution of the structure of social assistance beneficiaries. Until the end of the 1980s, these included mainly elderly people, people with disabilities, families with many children, families of alcoholics or orphans from orphanages. After the social changes, the majority of beneficiaries of social assistance included people of working age, usually in good health, but – mainly due to unemployment – deprived of sufficient means to support themselves<sup>52</sup>. While in the period of the “transformation shock” this feature of social assistance in the form of social protection for the unemployed did not raise any objections, and was even desirable, in the following years questions were asked more and more frequently about the essence, objectives, and, consequently, about the further development of social assistance. The growing dysfunctionality of social assistance resulted from its overloading with the number of tasks. In the 1990s, the subjective scope of social assistance was systematically extended, introducing new benefits and assistance programmes. “Social assistance was charged with the responsibility for solving problems that resulted from the lack of family policy, limitation of the educational and social functions of schools, faulty functioning of health care and the housing policy”<sup>53</sup>. This led to a situation where the activity of social assistance centres was almost entirely reduced to the payment of relatively small cash benefits at the cost of active social work, social activation or non-material services<sup>54</sup>.

The concept of the “four reforms” (the education system, public administration, health care and social security) implemented in the late 1990s by the government of the Solidarity Electoral Action and the Freedom Union, in the opinion of Barbara Szatur-Jaworska, contained one more element that could be called the “fifth social reform”<sup>55</sup>. Marek Rymśa even claims that social assistance in Poland was built “on the occasion” of creating self-

<sup>51</sup> KOWALCZYK, B., “System pomocy społecznej po dwudziestu latach – kierunki i ocena zmian”, *Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Studia i Dyskusje* 2012, No. 19, pp. 159–160.

<sup>52</sup> SZYLKO-SKOCZNY, M. (ed.), *Pomoc społeczna wobec zjawiska bezrobocia. Raport z badań*, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Warsaw 1993, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> RYBKA, I., “Diagnoza pomocy społecznej w latach 1991–2006. Możliwości i bariery zastosowania instrumentów ekonomii społecznej w pomocy społecznej”, *Ekonomia Społeczna. Teksty* 2006, No. 23, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> BOJANOWSKA, E., KRZYSZKOWSKI, J., *Pomoc społeczna: od opieki do pomocy*, in: BOJANOWSKA, E., GREWIŃSKI, M., RYMSZA, M., UŚCIŃSKA, G. (ed.), *Stulecie polskiej pomocy społecznej 1918–2018*, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Policy – National Centre for Culture, Warsaw 2018, p. 325.

<sup>55</sup> SZATUR-JAWORSKA, B., *Pomoc społeczna w nowym układzie administracyjnym*, in: FIRLIT-FESNAK, G. (ed.), *Regionalne aspekty reform społecznych*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warsaw 2001, p. 104.

government structures<sup>56</sup>. In fact, structural changes in the area of social assistance were a direct effect of the aforementioned public administration reform. New institutions appeared – family assistance centres in districts, and at the voivodship level – regional social policy centres (at voivodship boards) and social affairs departments (at voivodship offices). Therefore, the institutional changes in social assistance in 1999 did not affect only institutions located at the municipality level (social assistance centres) or at the central level (the ministry responsible for social security).

The adoption of another law on social assistance on 12 March 2004 was to start a new period of development of social assistance in Poland. The aforementioned legal provision, consisting of as many as 161 articles, was, on the one hand, an expression of the efforts to adapt Polish legal regulations to the requirements binding in the European Union, and, on the other hand, a reaction to the concepts of change that emerged in this area of social policy together with the assumption of power by the Democratic Left Alliance and the Polish People's Party. This concerns in particular the concept of the family benefits subsystem, which was to complement the social security system of the state and integrate the existing, dispersed activities in this area<sup>57</sup>. The adoption of the Act on Family Benefits in 2003, and thus the separation of these benefits from social assistance, resulted in an adjustment of the system. Following in the footsteps of these changes, the drafters of the new provision in the area of social assistance planned to direct the priorities of social assistance towards activation and social work through limiting the payment of cash benefits. Similar suggestions can be found in the work of Izabela Rybka, who states that the adoption of the new act was justified by the need to tighten the social assistance system, simplify the catalogue of benefits, increase flexibility in their granting and reduce malpractices in the scope of receiving benefits, including rationalisation of expenditure on benefits<sup>58</sup>. "The payment of benefits was considered an inadequate and ineffective form of service, while the social assistance system was assessed as inefficient, restrictive and ineffective. Therefore, it was proposed to adopt a law aimed at increasing the effectiveness of social assistance through activation of beneficiaries and their independence"<sup>59</sup>. The Act of 2004 also confirmed the division of tasks formed after the self-government reform of 1999, crucial for the functioning of this area of social policy, between territorial self-government units: municipalities (social assistance centres) were obliged, among other things, to: grant cash benefits, organize care services, provide shelter, social work, counselling, run social assistance homes and municipal support centres; districts (district family assistance centres) became responsible for: providing specialist counselling, assistance in integrating persons with difficulties in adapting to life with the environment, assistance to foreigners, running social

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<sup>56</sup> RYMSZA, M., *Praca socjalna i pracownicy socjalni po reformie samorządowej z 1999 roku*, in: FRYSZTACKI, K., PIĄTEK, K. (ed.), *Wielowymiarowość pracy socjalnej*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne Akapit, Toruń 2002, p. 99.

<sup>57</sup> HRYNKIEWICZ, J., *Zakres i kierunki zmiany w pomocy społecznej*, in: RYMSZA, M. (ed.), *Reformy społeczne. Bilans dekady*, the Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 2004, p. 105.

<sup>58</sup> RYBKA, I., op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

assistance homes and district support centres, and above all, providing family foster care; voivodships (regional social policy centres) were obliged to develop a voivodship strategy in the field of social policy, organise training of social assistance personnel and diagnose and monitor selected social problems in the region<sup>60</sup>. Elements of control and coordination of social assistance activities remained the domain of government administration: voivodship offices (social affairs departments) and the ministry responsible for social security.

Ideas to improve the system and attempts to introduce these changes are undoubtedly a characteristic feature of social assistance after 1990. The Act on Social Assistance of 1990 has been amended almost 30 times<sup>61</sup>. The permanent debate on the shape of social assistance resulted not only in subsequent amendments to the Act in force, but also in the emergence of concepts that have not yet been implemented. Undoubtedly, the most innovative project of changes in social assistance after 1999 appeared in 2013. It was then that the government proposed changes in the social assistance system, which were to contribute to the fact that “the granted benefits, social services offered, including social work, corresponded to the real needs and capabilities of individuals and families, and the mechanisms applied had a more mobilising and activating effect on their attitudes and increased their readiness to actively participate in public life, including cooperation with the local social environment”<sup>62</sup>. The amendment assumed the change of social assistance objectives (through focusing on preventive and activating activities) and a reformulation of the catalogue of cash benefits; modification of the organisational structure at the level of municipalities and districts and implementation of non-public entities to the social assistance system; creation of new professional specialisations of social workers and introduction of new forms of social contract; introduction of changes in the functioning of social assistance homes. However, despite numerous social and inter-ministerial arrangements, which resulted in as many as two versions of the draft amendment to the Act on Social Assistance, in 2014 the implementation of the amendment was abandoned and the draft landed in the Standing Committee of the Council of Ministers and did not enter into force.

After the Law and Justice party formed government in 2015, laws changing the image of Polish social policy and thus influencing the social assistance system, first of all by its beneficiaries, appeared. The Act on State Aid in Raising Children, adopted in 2016, called the “500 Plus Programme”, or the Act on Support for Pregnant Women and Families “For Life” adopted in the same year, illustrate the change in the approach to social policy/assistance – focusing primarily on the family, and the marginal treatment of the model of community organisation (SL) promoted so far or the resulting local activity programmes (pal). In other words, we are currently dealing with a clear shift in emphasis in social assistance from activation and independence measures to (financial) support for families.

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<sup>60</sup> “Act of 12 March 2004 on social assistance”, *Journal of Laws* 2004, No. 64, item 593 as further amended.

<sup>61</sup> cf. STOPKA, K., *Zasada subsydiarności w prawie pomocy społecznej*, Difin, Warsaw 2009, p. 99.

<sup>62</sup> *Draft assumptions of the draft act amending the act on social assistance and some other acts. Option I*, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Warsaw 2014, p. 6.

The process of professionalisation of social assistance personnel, which started in the 1990s, assumes continuous improvement of qualifications by social workers. Specialisations in the profession of social worker and supervision of social work are to serve to this end. The profession of a social worker belongs to the group of regulated professions, which means that its performance depends on meeting the requirements specified in legal regulations. Originally, the Act on Social Assistance of 1990 contained a provision stating that a social worker may be a person who graduated from a social workers' school or completed higher education in the following fields: social work, social policy, re-socialisation, sociology, pedagogy, psychology or other related fields. Moreover, this profession could be exercised by persons with a higher education diploma obtained in the fields of study not listed above, if they completed a specialisation in the field of social assistance organisation, which has been in operation since the 1980s, or related post-graduate studies<sup>63</sup>. In 2005, 3-year colleges of social workers were introduced in the system of education of social workers, which were supposed to replace 2.5-year post-secondary schools for social workers established in the 1990s. At the academic level, a new field of study: social work has also been created.

Currently, according to the provisions of the Act on Social Assistance of 2004, a social worker may be a person who holds a diploma from a college of social service employees or who has completed studies in the field of social work (i.e. higher education studies of the first or second degree in the field of social work)<sup>64</sup>. According to the data of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, in 2017 over 130 thousand people were employed in organisational units of social assistance and social integration. Regional social policy centres employed less than 1,000 people; district family assistance centres – less than 7,000 people (including only slightly more than 1,000 people in the position of social worker); social assistance centres – more than 55,000 people (including less than 20,000 in the position of social worker); while social assistance homes – more than 53,000 people<sup>65</sup>.

## Conclusion

The fate of social welfare and social assistance in Poland was and still is closely connected with the condition and direction of changes in the Polish statehood. Changes taking place within this institution were like a litmus test – indicating the significant role assigned to it by decision-makers against the background of priorities in the social and economic development of the country.

The process of constructing the social welfare system began when Poland regained independence in 1918. In the so-called rescue period, an important role was played by social organizations, whose significance in the welfare system could not be overestimated

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<sup>63</sup> “Act of 29 November 1990 on social assistance”, op. cit.

<sup>64</sup> “Act of 12 March 2004 on social assistance”, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> *MPiPS report, Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy*, Warsaw 2017: <https://www.mpips.gov.pl/pomoc-spoleczna/raporty-i-statystyki/statystyki-pomocy-spolecznej/statystyka-za-rok-2017/> [accessed: 12.10.2018].

throughout the entire interwar period. An important moment in the development of the institution was the adoption of the Social Welfare Act in 1923 which determined the shape of the system. It also gave it a local, self-government character. The tasks faced by the system – and above all by the municipalities – were very ambitious, but also difficult to achieve, e.g. due to the already mentioned relocation and limitation of expenditure on social objectives.

After the Second World War, the communist authorities imposed in Poland did not allow for the continuation of the development of social welfare based on Polish traditions, which were in line with the concepts of social security systems established in many countries of Western Europe and in the United States. Instead, the new social system brought solutions based on total control of the state over the social assistance sector, abandonment of grassroots initiatives, as well as new solutions, which were characterized by low effectiveness and selectivity in the approach to social problems.

The period of the Third Polish Republic is a time of permanent changes in the social assistance system. The mere fact that three laws regulating this area of social policy, including two in the last three decades, have been adopted during the whole 100-year period of social assistance development, speaks volumes about the contemporary dynamics of changes in this system. During the systemic transformation, social assistance was supposed to alleviate the effects of economic reforms, and we can say that it fulfilled this task satisfactorily. However, thirty years have passed since then, and the system is still stuck in the realities of social and economic changes of the 1990s, focusing on the payment of cash benefits<sup>66</sup>. And all this despite constant amendments to laws, surveys and documents on the functioning of Polish social assistance.

Elżbieta Bojanowska and Jerzy Krzyszkowski claim that the century-long history of Polish social assistance was characterised by two, in a way parallel, processes. On the one hand, the system constantly tried to react to new social problems, and on the other hand, the growing complexity and diversity of the organisational structures of social assistance forced actions aimed at integrating and coordinating the system<sup>67</sup>. Undoubtedly, these processes still affect it, and it seems that a century old – “zigzagged” – as described by Dariusz Zalewski<sup>68</sup>, development of social assistance in Poland is far from what could be described as the “final stage”.

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<sup>66</sup> cf. CHACZKO, K., “Przeszłość niedokończona”. *O imitacji i zaniechaniach w reformowaniu systemu pomocy społecznej*, “*Studia Politicae Universitatis Silesiensis*” 2018, Vol. 20, pp. 79–96.

<sup>67</sup> BOJANOWSKA, E., KRZYSZKOWSKI, J., op. cit., p. 340.

<sup>68</sup> ZALEWSKI, D., *Posłowie*, in: BRENK, M., CHACZKO, K., PLĄSEK, R., *Organizacja pomocy społecznej w Polsce 1918–2018. Podręcznik akademicki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2018, p. 171.



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