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## **PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN POLAND**

*The education of social workers in Poland has the ancient tradition, dating back to the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The modern times with new social problems require social workers not only to diagnose and work up projects, but also expand the existing scope of their activities. The main legal document that determines principles of training and work in the profession of a social worker is the Act on Social Assistance from March 12, 2004. The aim of the currently planned changes in the social assistance system in Poland is to increase the effectiveness of the social assistance system by enhancing individual's assistance to recipient.*

**Keywords:** *social work, social worker, education, professional training, authority.*

### **The understanding of social work**

The education of social workers in Poland has a tradition dating back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The profession has evolved from a social activist to a professional social worker. 1923 saw the adoption of the social welfare act providing for the appointment of social assistants while in 1929, the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare issued an ordinance concerning the appointment of social assistants and the manner in which their duties should be performed [8, 30].

The education of social workers not only introduces them into specific fields of knowledge and competence but also shapes their psychosocial and moral attitudes indispensable in work that consists of providing help to individuals, families or groups that often suffer from demoralisation, crime, poverty, disease or mental disorders. The candidates for the profession should be thoroughly trained for the work that requires devotion to serving others, ability to understand their needs and readiness to help them and show them sympathy [4, 82 – 83].

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Modern times, rife with new social problems, require social workers not only to diagnose problems and prepare ways of remedying them, but also to expand the existing scope of activities. The unique character and difficulty of social work depends on the tasks and responsibility for their execution towards various entities: clients, institutions and communities [2, 211].

More and more often, social workers have to extend help outside the social assistance centres by reaching out to excluded groups, which entails the necessity to reorient the current tasks of social workers from an administrative role to the counselling, advisory and supporting role. The reality places new challenges and requirements on social workers such as the knowledge of the local labour market and the ability to apply for EU funds and liaise with companies, government agencies, nongovernmental organisations and educational institutions and, quite often, work in dysfunctional environments and with marginalised groups. The measures are taken not only with regard to individuals but also entire families affected by unemployment, poverty and helplessness [7, 33 – 34].

The modern social worker is also a professional. As Szmagalski [3, 242] emphasises, the professionalisation of the profession has been a long process. Professional social work is based on expert theoretical knowledge acquired through formal education and perfected through professional practice. Although this profession should enjoy authority and respect in society, the role of social workers in society is often characterised by a lack of clarity and cohesion.

As most surveys indicate, social workers in Poland face various obstacles in their work, e.g.:

- obligation to complete excessive and often unnecessary amounts of documentation, time limitations and insufficient funds, which has a negative impact on efficiency and satisfaction with work;
- strict dependency on regulations that frequently change and paralyse independent action and initiative of social workers.

The Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance stresses that social assistance is an institution of the state's social policy whose objective is to help individuals and families overcome difficult life situations that they cannot cope with using their own capacity, resources and opportunities; the assistance is organised by central and local government bodies in partnership with civic and nongovernmental organisations, religious organisations as well as natural and legal persons (Dz. U. [Journal of Laws] No. 175, item 1362 as amended, Art. 2 par. 1 and 2).

Social work holds an important place among the objectives of social assistance. The Act mentioned above defines social work as «professional activity aimed at helping individuals and families to strengthen or regain their capacity to function in society by performing their relevant social roles as well as at creating conditions conducive to this objective (Dz. U. No. 175, item 1362, Art. 6(12), as amended). Thus, the role of social work is to

provide professional assistance to those who need to strengthen or regain their ability to function in society as well as to create conducive social conditions. The objectives of social work are specified in detail in Article 45 of said Act. Social work is provided to improve the functioning of individuals and families in their social environment. Social work involves work with:

1) individuals and families in order to develop or strengthen their active attitude to life and self-reliance;

2) local communities to ensure the cooperation and coordination of institutions and organisations that respond to the needs of community members (Dz. U. No. 175, item 1362 as amended, Art. 45 par. 1(1) and 1(2)).

Article 45 of the Act also refers to the methods and techniques characteristic of social work and specifies that:

– social work may be carried out based on a social contract;

– social work employs appropriate methods and techniques while respecting the dignity of individuals and their right to self-determination;

– social work is provided to individuals and families regardless of their income (Dz. U. No. 175, item 1362 as amended, Art. 45 par. 2, 3 and 4).

#### **The legal aspect of the profession of a social worker**

The requirements concerning the education necessary to work as a social worker are stipulated in the Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance. Pursuant to Article 116(1), one has to meet at least one of the following requirements in order to be a social worker, i.e.:

– graduate from a college of social service workers;

– complete higher education studies in the field of social work;

– complete higher education studies, until 31 December 2013, with a specialisation preparing the graduate to work as a social worker, in one of the following fields: Pedagogy, Special Education, Political Science, Social Policy, Psychology, Sociology, Family Studies.

Pursuant to the Act on Social Assistance, the qualifications needed to become a social worker cannot be acquired by completing a postgraduate course or training course [1, 21].

The Act also details the degrees of professional specialisation for social workers:

– 1<sup>st</sup> degree of professional specialisation in social work is aimed at supplementing the knowledge and perfecting the professional skills of social workers;

– 2<sup>nd</sup> degree of professional specialisation in social work is aimed at expanding the knowledge and perfecting the ability to work with selected groups of people receiving social assistance (Act on Social Assistance, Art. 116, par. 2).

The 1<sup>st</sup> degree of professional specialisation in social work is aimed at supplementing the knowledge and perfecting professional skills. In order to obtain the 1<sup>st</sup> degree of professional specialisation, a social worker must have

at least 3 years' experience working in social assistance business units, complete training for the 1<sup>st</sup> degree of professional specialisation and pass the relevant exam before the regional examination board.

Obtaining the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree of professional specialisation is possible if a social worker has obtained the 1<sup>st</sup> degree of professional specialisation or has completed master's degree studies in the selected field. A further requirement is at least five years' experience working in social assistance business units, completing training for the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree of professional specialisation and passing the relevant exam before the regional examination board [1, 22].

Detailed tasks which a social worker is legally obliged to perform are defined in Chapter 2 of the Act on Social Assistance.

The responsibilities of a social worker include in particular:

- 1) social work;
- 2) analysing and assessing phenomena giving rise to the need for the assistance of social services, and determining the eligibility to receive such assistance;
- 3) providing information, advice and assistance to individuals with regard to solving problems that result in their difficult life circumstances; thanks to this assistance, these individuals should be able to solve these problems; effective application of the applicable laws in the performance of these tasks;
- 4) advising people in difficult life circumstances on the possibilities of solving their problems and obtaining assistance from relevant national and local government institutions and nongovernmental organisations, and helping them obtain this assistance;
- 5) providing assistance pursuant to the professional ethical principles;
- 6) stimulating community involvement and inspiring people to take self-assistance measures in order to satisfy the basic life needs of individuals, groups and communities;
- 7) cooperating with other experts in order to prevent and limit negative social phenomena and their effects and to alleviate the results of poverty;
- 8) initiating new forms of assistance to individuals and families in difficult life circumstances and inspiring the establishment of institutions providing services that improve the situation of such individuals and families;
- 9) participation in the initiation, preparation, implementation and development of regional and local social assistance programmes aimed at improving the quality of life (Art. 119, Art. 6(12), Dz. U. of 2009 No. 175, item 1362).

In the performance of their responsibilities, social workers are obliged to:

- 1) observe the professional ethical principles;
- 2) observe the principle of the good of the individuals and families they serve, respect their dignity and right to self-determination;
- 3) prevent practices that violate the principle of humanitarianism and discriminate against an individual, family or group;

4) provide those interested with full information about the benefits and forms of assistance they are entitled to;

5) maintain the confidentiality of information received in the course of their professional activity, also after the termination of a social worker's employment unless the disclosure of such information is in the interest of an individual or family;

6) enhance their professional qualifications through participation in training courses and self-learning (Art. 119 of the Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance, Art. 6(12), Dz. U. of 2009 No. 175, item 1362).

In their everyday work, social workers have a lot of responsibilities manifested in the following tasks:

- ✓ analysing and assessing phenomena giving rise to the need for the assistance of social services, and determining the eligibility to receive such assistance;

- ✓ providing information, advice and assistance with regard to solving life problems to individuals who, thanks to this assistance, should be able to solve the problem giving rise to their difficult life circumstances;

- ✓ stimulating community involvement and inspiring people to take self-assistance measures in order to satisfy the basic life needs of individuals, groups and communities;

- ✓ participation in the initiation, preparation, implementation and development of social programmes aimed at improving the quality of life;

- ✓ identifying, analysing and interpreting social needs and problems influencing the formation of appropriate interpersonal relationships, improving living standards as well as finding positive solutions to social problems;

- ✓ cooperating with other professionals, institutions and organisations in order to improve the existing solutions in social work and seek for new ones;

- ✓ participating in various forms of professional development and training aimed at improving professional competencies;

- ✓ initiating new forms of assistance to individuals in difficult circumstances, and inspiring efforts to establish institutions that could provide services necessary to improve these circumstances;

- ✓ initiating and participating in research on social problems (diagnosis of needs), monitoring and evaluation of programmes and actions [6, 82 – 83].

A novelty of the Act on Social Assistance is the provision according to which social workers have the right to receive guidance from social work supervisors. The goal of this guidance is to maintain and strengthen the professional competence of social workers, maintain a high standard of service and prevent occupational burnout. The form of guidance and the supervisor providing it are chosen in consultation with the employer. In order to work as a supervisor, one has to complete social work supervision training and obtain a social work supervision certificate.

Pursuant to the *Committee draft act amending the act on social assistance, dated 5 August 2015 (form 3473)*:

1) the goal of social work supervision is to ensure the continuous professional development of social workers and, consequently, maintain a high standard of services, maintain and strengthen professional competence, provide support, identify the sources of challenges at work and look for ways of addressing them (Art. 121a);

2) Every social worker is entitled to social work supervision provided by social work supervisors;

3) In order to work as a supervisor, one has to complete social work supervision training, pass the exam and obtain a social work supervision certificate;

4) The training referred to in par. 3 above can be conducted by entities educating social workers or providing training with regard to the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> degree of professional specialisation in social work; these entities must have at least three years' experience in this respect as well as the relevant permission issued by the minister responsible for social policy and welfare to conduct training for social work supervisors;

5) In order to join a social work supervisor course, one has to apply for admission to such a course and prove one's master's degree education required to pursue the profession of a social worker, or prove that one's qualifications in the regulated profession of a social worker have been recognised pursuant to the Act of 18 March 2008 on the principles governing the recognition of professional qualifications obtained in EU Member States (Dz. U. No. 63, item 394 and of 2013 item 1650). Another requirement that has to be met is to have at least five years' experience working in social assistance units or to have documented experience in conducting at least 500 hours of training for social workers with regard to interpersonal and social skills, methodology of social work, social diagnosis, social work methods or axiology of social work in the last five years before submitting an application for admission to a social work supervisor training course.

#### **Planned amendments in the field of social assistance**

The aim of the currently planned amendments to the social assistance system is to increase the effectiveness of the system by ensuring a greater empowerment of the recipients of this assistance. «Amendments in the social assistance system are to help ensure that the awarded benefits and social services, including social work, correspond to the real needs and capabilities of individuals and families, and that the applied mechanisms have a more galvanising impact on their attitudes and readiness to take active part in public life and cooperate within the local community». Among the four key principles of the amendments, two seem to be particularly significant, i.e. principle no. 2 – Improving the effectiveness of the organisational system of social assistance and ensuring its compatibility with other support systems, and

principle no. 3 – Strengthening the effectiveness of the essential social work tools and instruments at municipality and county level in order to rescue individuals and families from the risk of social exclusion (*Draft principles of the draft act amending the act on social assistance and other acts*, 2014, p. 8 – 9).

In order to implement the amendments at municipality and county level and increase the effectiveness of the social assistance system, the role and significance of prevention and activation measures and social services are to be strengthened. The amendments also seek to allow municipal and county governments some freedom in adjusting the internal structure of social assistance business units so that purely administrative tasks are separated from the performance of social work and provision of social services.

These amendments will encompass the names of the existing social assistance units, i.e. the current name «social assistance centre» (regardless of the local government level, except for the province) is to be changed to «Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services». Depending on the municipality or county, Municipal Social Assistance Centres will be replaced by the Municipal Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services (municipality level), County Centres of Family Support will be replaced by the County Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services (county level), Municipal Centres of Social Assistance and Municipal Centres of Family support will be replaced by the Municipal Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services (town with county status).

The internal structure of the Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services is also to be changed. According to the proposals, two departments of the unit, i.e. Department of Social Work and Department of Social services, will be obligatory, while the Income Support Fund (or Department of Income Support) will be optional, created within or outside the Centre (within the structure of the municipal office), depending on the decision of municipal or county government.

New tasks assigned to the Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services at municipality level would encompass the following:

- 1) examining and monitoring the welfare situation in the municipality and conducting an annual assessment of social assistance resources along with the preparation of recommendations for the Municipal Council;

- 2) conducting social work with individuals and families in the area of the municipality based on family social enquiry reports and social contracts;

- 3) organising the municipal system of social services based on the results of the examinations and assessments of social assistance resources as well as the current needs of the local community, including: purchasing social services from nongovernmental organisations, community integration centres and clubs and social cooperatives in the field of social and professional re-integration; these entities will have the status of Social Services Agencies.

- 4) providing social services according to local needs and pursuant to the adopted performance standards;

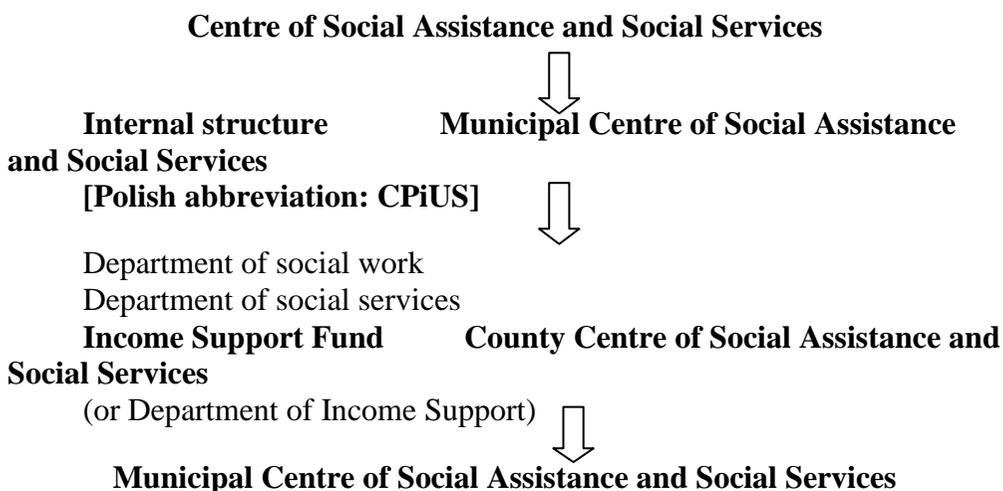


Fig. 1. NEW SOCIAL ASSISTANCE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AT MUNICIPALITY AND COUNTY LEVEL (based on *Draft principles of the draft act amending the act on social assistance and other acts*, 2014)

5) taking measures pursuant to the Act on Supporting the Family and Foster Care System;

6) initiating, organising, supervising and coordinating local projects for the social activation and integration of specific groups of people at risk of social exclusion, including projects part-financed by external sources of funding;

7) taking administrative decisions enabling individuals and families to receive monetary benefits, without their technical preparation, and referring applications for the award and disbursement of benefits to the Income Support Fund (or Department of Income Support);

8) conducting information and promotion activities addressed to the population of the municipality concerning the possibilities of obtaining support and assistance;

9) cooperation with various institutions and entities belonging to the network support and assistance model within the municipality, including, first and foremost, the county employment office, social and professional reintegration institutions, social economy entities, local entrepreneurs, school education institutions, healthcare entities whose activity is focussed on eliminating social exclusion.

The basic tasks of the County Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services will include:

1) organising and supervising networks of institutional services within the county for various categories of recipients. The catalogue of institutional social services includes, social assistance homes, support centres, crisis intervention centres, community self-help centres and other entities;

2) organising and supervising prevention, activation and intervention services provided to individuals such as disabled people, foreigners;

3) organising, coordinating and supervising the system of family support and foster care within the county.

The tasks of the Income Support Funds (or Departments of Income Support) will encompass:

1) preparing administrative decisions;

2) disbursement of monetary benefits (e.g. social benefits, jobseeker's allowance) and conducting the accounting of subsidies to intervention services provided for in the Act on Social Assistance;

3) providing accounting and financial service, including the handling of payments for external services commissioned by the Centre of Social Assistance and Social Services (*Draft principles of the draft act amending the act on social assistance and other acts*, 2014, p. 26 – 28).

**Conclusions.** Education preparing students for social professions is a major responsibility for theoreticians and practitioners involved in the professional training of social workers. Representatives of the social professions today are required to have enormous knowledge, expertise, sense of responsibility and experience. Furthermore, this profession is often regarded as a social mission. Hence the process of educating social workers requires great prudence both on the part of the students and those who organise and implement education.

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**Каньос Анна. Проблеми освіти та професійної підготовки соціальних працівників у Польщі.** Навчання соціальних працівників в Польщі має давню традиції, яка обіймає кінець ХІХ – початок ХХ ст. Сьогодні, висуваючи нові соціальні проблеми, вимагає від соціальних працівників не тільки діагностування і опрацювання проектів, але й розширює існуючий дотепер спектр їхньої діяльності. Основним правовим документом, що визначає засади навчання і діяльності у професії соціального працівника, є Закон «Про соціальну допомогу» від 12 березня 2004 р. У даний час у Польщі плануються зміни в системі соціального забезпечення, і їх метою є підвищення ефективності системи соціального забезпечення шляхом підвищення допомоги суб'єкта одержувача.

**Ключові слова:** соціальна робота, соціальний працівник, освіта, професійна підготовка, повноваження.

**Каньос Анна. Проблемы образования и профессиональной подготовки социальных работников в Польше.** Обучение социальных работников в Польше имеет давнюю традиции, касается конца ХІХ – начала ХХ в. Настоящее, выдвигая новые социальные проблемы, требует от социальных работников не только диагностирования и подготовки проектов, но и расширяет существующий до сих пор спектр их деятельности. Основным правовым документом, определяющим принципы обучения и деятельности в профессии социального работника, является Закон «О социальной помощи» от 12 марта 2004 г. В настоящее время в Польше планируются изменения в системе социального обеспечения, и их целью является повышение эффективности системы социального обеспечения путем повышения помощи субъекта получателя.

**Ключевые слова:** социальная работа, социальный работник, образование, профессиональная подготовка, полномочия.

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