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*Empowering functions of welfare
conditionality in Poland
– social workers’ perspective²*

Abstract

Conditional policies are well established in modern European welfare states, as one of the most important economic and social reintegration instruments. The article assesses the relationship between conditionality and empowerment in Polish social assistance, particularly through the use of a social contract (version of an individual action plan). The analysis drew on a survey conducted among managers in social assistance centres and social workers. Results showed a very high level of normative support for conditional welfare arrangements among social workers, similar to the results of studies conducted in other countries. About half of the respondents supported individual social contracts as an effective empowerment instrument. Positive attitudes towards conditionality

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were related to its higher perceived psychological and professional empowering functions. The fit between adopted reintegration measures – social work, vocational training, psychological, and family support – and the perception of empowerment pointed to high organisational coherence in social assistance. The research also shows the importance of the normative acceptance of conditionality in social assistance, which is embedded in welfare policy even if not sufficiently expressed in social work practice.

Keywords: empowerment, social work, social contract, social policy, conditional benefits

Introduction

One of the various dilemmas of the modern welfare state is the choice between basing policies, measures, and benefits on universal entitlements or conditionality. Basic income programmes, which have been gaining popularity in recent years (Atkinson, 2015; Delsen, 2019) are a clear expression of the former. On the opposite end, there are activation and workfare policies where benefits are granted upon fulfilling legal and behavioural conditions including – among other things – participation in active reintegration measures (Clasen & Clegg, 2007). These conditions vary between the different welfare states and social safety net traditions and are established within specific social programmes either in terms of the process of entering a particular social programme or continuing already granted support. Conditional policies have been particularly oriented on labour market (re)integration (van Berkel, 2020; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018), though, in recent years, they have extended beyond the typical workfare state, oriented mainly on the professional (re)activation of the long-term unemployed, to policies targeted at other vulnerable or excluded social categories: people with disabilities, the homeless, the chronically ill, or single parents (Patrick et al., 2011; Reeves & Loopstra, 2017). Increasingly, these policies also seek to change attitudes and behaviours that are only indirectly related to labour market activity; benefit-related sanctions also discipline behaviour considered antisocial – domestic violence, child neglect, and maltreatment, non-compliance with compulsory education, behavioural disorders, or all kinds of addiction. And – in the spirit of the “new paternalism” (Mead, 1997) visible in both US workfare and European activation policies – such behavioural pressure seems natural and expected: “A more cohesive society requires both a more equitable distribution of resources and a greater sense of mutual responsibility. More immediately, both are necessary if anti-social behaviour is to be tackled” (Deacon, 2004, p. 924). Consequently, modern welfare states appear to resolve the dilemmas of constructing social support systems with increasingly common conditionality (Venn, 2012; Watts & Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 4–7; Gray, 2004) – despite its controversies.

The literature on the welfare state’s transition toward conditionality seems to be dominated by discourse-oriented, critical analyses – emphasising that the mechanisms proposed by the proponents of conditionality-based reintegration policies have more to do with surveillance, social control, and disciplining (in the Foucauldian sense) than with the declared (as part of activation policies) empowerment (see: Soss et al., 2011; Schram et al., 2008; Standing, 2011, Dwyer, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Wacquant, 2008;

Cruikshank, 1996). These analyses tend to focus on power, governance issues, and relations within the institutional structures responsible for the implementation of activation, workfare, or welfare-to-work policies and programmes, and on the (usually critically assessed) latent functions and perverse effects of these policies.

In this article, we are referring to the more empirical (and often equally critical to welfare state reforms as the “Foucauldian”) perspective, building on Michael Lipsky’s (1980) approach, and focusing on the street-level implementation of welfare conditionality. The article addresses the issue of how frontline social workers’ respond to the assumptions of activation policy, in what way they interpret those assumptions, and – in particular – what justifications they share regarding conditionality and welfare sanctions. There is a growing body of literature on street-level research on social work and social policy (see: Nothdurfter & Hermans, 2018), various aspects of the frontline reactions to welfare reforms, on the role of discretionary decision-making under pressure to individualise and personalise benefits and services, and on sanctioning, all in an increasingly bureaucratic environment (see: Morgen et al., 2010; Sadeghi & Terum, 2020; chapters in van Berkel & Valkenburg, 2007; chapters in Klammer et al., 2019a). However, there is a lack of analyses that set variation in the patterns of the perception and justification of conditionality (behavioural conditionality – typical for the workfare-like solutions in particular) in an organisational context and show which locally relevant factors are responsible for this variation.

This article aims to discuss the perception of conditionality principles among frontline social workers in Poland and their interpretations of the goals and presumed outcomes of the individual action plans (see: van Berkel, 2020; further on we will use – in accordance with the Polish law on social assistance – the term “social contract”) from the perspective of empowerment. In other words, we address one of the main ethical arguments in favour of conditionality. As coercive and disciplining policies typically contain an element of upgrading skills, building up human capital, and other social and psychological competencies (van Berkel et al. 2018), we investigate conditionality in relation to empowerment, an intended effect of a social contract. Empowerment is approached in the article as a multifaceted phenomenon: a tool improving self-perception and motivations for welfare system clients, their labour market (re)integration, and their social activation. This definition reflects an observation that social work managers and frontline workers tend to perceive empowerment and conditionality from the perspective of their clients’ overall (re)integration rather than concentrating solely on a single item, such as the labour market or social integration (Sadeghi & Terum, 2020).

The main research problem of the article concentrates on the organisational factors that impact the outcome of social work and the use of conditional tools and measures. We discuss welfare conditionality, pointing to its dependency upon policy structures and paradigms, the governance context, the occupational context, and the beliefs and attitudes within social assistance. After van Berkel (2017, 2020), we recognise that social workers are the real agents of the welfare state and important policy actors and implementers (Klammer et al., 2019b) who translate the general principles of social policy into practice by making day-to-day decisions about the proper (or – on the contrary – undesirable) and feasible reactions to beneficiaries’ claims, behaviour and de-

servicingness, and to the social problems within their communities. Within this framework, we investigate the support of social workers for welfare conditionality and the level of acceptance of values and attitudes supporting both activation and the use of conditional measures in Polish social assistance. The second question refers to how attitudes and organisational factors (such as social workers' years of experience or different types of activation measures) impact the perceived empowerment of welfare recipients. The analysis was built upon the assumption that successful empowerment results from an interaction of an individual with organisational and social contexts (Hardina, 2005; Speer & Peterson, 2000; Guttiéres et al. 1995).

Empowerment and conditionality – context of the analysis

Welfare conditionality is built on reciprocity, where the mutual rights and obligations of the state welfare institutions, and the individual are established and expected to be followed (White, 2003). Such an approach assumes that each citizen should participate in building the common welfare and that not fulfilling this obligation towards the state is a misuse of trust. Whilst the state guarantees fair and just redistribution, respecting human and social rights, a contract in return gives an individual the obligation to participate and – in the case of those recognised as passive and excluded – to activate. Contractual arrangements should stimulate *good workfare*, understood as welfare policies and activities aimed at achievable goals and a real prospect of returning to the labour market and the community (Goodin, 2002). In this context, European Union social policy – emphasising the need for social inclusion through policies aimed at creating a social environment that empowers vulnerable social groups – also promotes conditional policies and measures (Rymsza, 2013; Rymsza & Karwacki, 2017).

The main criticism of conditionality is that it violates the coherence of citizenship status, which has been identified – following T.H. Marshall (1950) – as the basis of the modern welfare state and the main mechanism of egalitarianism (see: Dwyer, 2004). It is also pointed out that the prevalence of conditionality leads to the transformation of social benefits into a tool mainly for disciplining and re-educating those who “fail to meet the conditions of active citizenship by their readiness to work and be civically engaged” (Rodger, 2008, p. 19). Criticisms of conditionality also have an empirical basis; e.g., it has been shown that conditionality reduces the take-up of welfare benefits (Griggs & Evans, 2010), reinforces a threat of job loss and acceptance of poorer working conditions, and tends to privilege only the initial transition into the labour market without proper care about job quality – thus fostering the precarisation of employment (Boland & Griffin, 2015; Peck, 2002) – and builds negative attitudes towards welfare clients by reinforcing social polarisation (Sage, 2012).

Empowerment is a crucial normative modern social work concept, relating to both inclusive efforts to work with the socially excluded as well as the overall goals of social work and welfare policy, and it is often referred to when the effectiveness of social work is considered. In principle, empowerment should lead to stimulating the capacities of individuals, groups, and communities, enabling them to take control over their own lives and circumstances (Adams, 2008; DuBois & Krosgrud Miley, 2014). From an

individual perspective, taking control is a long-term process of learning how to exercise individual power and capabilities to achieve one's own goals and eventually improve the quality of one's life (Parsons, 1991; Hryniewicka, 2011). In social work practice, empowerment means challenging deficits arising from poverty, unemployment, adverse family circumstances, disability, or other correlates of social exclusion, and conditional instruments are often used as tools of empowerment.

From the street-level perspective, empowering social assistance beneficiaries' is built on the relationship between a social worker and her or his client. Establishing a social contract (an individual action plan) requires the professional to work with the vulnerable person, and often also her or his family, and gradually progress towards empowerment with the person or the family. Empowerment, however, frequently crosses a line into paternalism, wherein life decisions are being imposed by the social welfare institution or other community groups and individuals, and eventually interfere with individual freedom. Reamer (1983, 2005) underlines that paternalistic behaviours are typically justified by a belief that appropriate actions will be undertaken and the person in need is not able to undertake them fully independently. In principle, the empowering interaction between the representative of social assistance and the vulnerable person should rely on trust and reciprocity, though the actual cooperation strongly depends on the perception of both sides of the potential for building up self-confidence, which will eventually lead to social and economic reintegration and well-being (Törrönen et al., 2013; Nothdurfter, 2016).

Taking the organisational perspective, the creation of an activating institutional environment is crucial to support the empowerment process. Gutiérrez et al. (1995) point to the institutional preconditions and barriers to empowerment that are experienced by social workers and other administrative staff. Effectively adopting an empowering approach depends on pre-existing local institutional arrangements (Trætteberg & Grødem, 2022), but also on a given social worker's knowledge, attitude, and accumulated professional experience (Lee, 2001), which is important for an adequate assessment of the client's life circumstances, needs, and capabilities. The latter is prone to subjectivity in evaluating the mental and physical abilities of the social assistance client, assessing her or his relations with the closest social environment, material standing, and mental competencies (Clark, 1998). Social workers tend not to be aware of the complexity of the clients' situation, family, and social environment, or psychological standing, and thus project their interpretation onto clients' behaviours (Hryniewicka, 2011).

Besides interpersonal factors and the engagement of both sides in supporting empowerment, the potential for successful reintegration and improving well-being might also be conditioned by external, institutional factors, including insufficient funding of reintegration activities or poor sustainability in the long run, particularly, if activation measures are introduced within short-term projects. Management within the social welfare institution might also play a role when deciding upon undertaking empowering activities in place of simply mitigating the negative effects of poor economic standing during the social work process and granting income support (Raeymaeckers & Dierckx, 2013). Finally, but of importance for this study, the normative attitudes, values, and beliefs shared within an organisation might have an impact on social workers' attitudes

towards clients, assessment of their standing, and proposed activities to improve their well-being (Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Hryniewicka, 2011; Gjersøe et al., 2020).

Social assistance and the social contract in Poland

The welfare state in Poland has evolved over the transition period from communism to modern capitalism. In the first period of rapidly increasing poverty and skyrocketing unemployment, a social safety net was established based on cash benefits to prevent people from falling into poverty; further welfare policies were shaped by economic drivers and the neo-liberal paradigm (see chapters in: Cerami & Vanhuyse, 2009; Golinowska, 2003; Golinowska, 2009). The key element of this paradigm that directly shaped the reform of social security institutions and the attitude towards redistribution was the emphasis on the individual responsibility of individuals and the generally individualistic orientation clearly present, as Woźniak (2012) writes, in the parliamentary discourse, party programmes, and public debates. Adaptive, individualised strategies for the vulnerable included competition, at the risk of economic and social exclusion, for scarce resources (e.g., by entering early retirement whenever feasible) or turning to informal markets (the grey economy) whilst relying on welfare support (Vanhuyse, 2001). At the same time, welfare institutions were promoting more liberal, welfare-to-work solutions, including those tailored to service individualisation and based on conditions of conduct (Clasen & Clegg, 2007), such as a social contract – an indigenous variant of the individual action plans known from other EU countries (van Berkel, 2020). The trend was not unique, as many welfare states have introduced conditional benefits in social assistance, which was stimulated by policies oriented towards the introduction of a social protection floor and inclusive society (Dornan & Porter, 2013; Watts et al., 2014).

In this article, we concentrate on social contracts, which are the most important welfare policy instrument representing conduct conditionality in Polish social assistance, i.e., in this element of the social protection system, which by definition is conditional (e.g., social assistance is and has always been provided on the basis of an income test). The instrument was introduced to social work by the Law on Social Assistance of 2004 (the same year Poland joined the European Union and started to gradually implement elements of active social policy). Contracts can be voluntarily implemented by social assistance offices; however, this solution is strongly promoted and centres as well as social workers are increasingly encouraged to use it. Being a partnership agreement, though partners are not fully equal in this relation, it is a tool of shared responsibility between the state and the vulnerable person; furthermore, it may even transfer the responsibility from the state to the welfare system client (McDonald & Morston, 2008).

There are different types of social contracts in Poland. Firstly, a contract can be a labour market reintegration instrument. Secondly, it can address other types of problems that lead to social exclusion, including adverse family situations, homelessness, or addictive substance abuse. The agreement includes a list of activities that the client of the social welfare institution should fulfil in order to – as assessed by the social

worker – (re)gain self-confidence, independence, and improve her or his well-being. Although not fulfilling its conditions is linked to penalties, including limitation or withdrawal of material support, the contract is in principle based on a voluntary partnership and is a flagship empowerment tool of the Polish welfare system (Golczyńska-Grondas & Kretek-Kamińska, 2007), granting social workers the power to evaluate the needs of social welfare clients, whilst protecting clients' ability to make independent decisions. In principle, a social welfare client should have the ability to participate in establishing the contract's conditions and agree to them (or not). The optimal goal of a social contract is to support a vulnerable person's capabilities to regain financial, social, and psychological independence (Sen, 1992), which corresponds to the empowerment dimensions included in the analysis.

Despite the fact that social contracts have been used for almost two decades, they are still not common in social work practice in Poland. The share of social assistance beneficiaries with social contracts oscillates around 5% annually, with about one-third of social assistance centres not using this form of conditional benefit (Sowa-Kofta, 2018). The instrument is frequently used within reintegration programmes funded by the European Social Fund and various short-term projects. Data show that, in fact, more than 80% of all social contracts are concluded within EU-funded programmes (Poławski, 2017), which means that the main conditionality measure works insofar as the related, individualised activation measures find additional (i.e., not from the relatively modest but stable and predictable local budgets), and usually relatively generous, external financing.

A look at the situation in Poland, where social assistance is still an institution in *statu nascendi* and where the social support system does not constitute an easily identifiable "welfare regime" (Poławski, 2021) will provide a somewhat different point of reference for knowledge on the transformations of the contemporary welfare state. Moreover, most analyses, including those taking the street-level perspective, are based on data from Anglo-Saxon countries or the "old" EU member states, characterised by a relatively stable structure of social support institutions and strong social work traditions.

Research methods

To answer the research questions we used quantitative data collected within a project entitled *Conditionality and contractualism in social assistance* funded by the National Science Centre in Poland. The aim of this project, conducted in the years 2015–2018, was to understand the mechanisms behind the use and misuse of conditional measures within social assistance, with particular attention given to social contracts and their effects, including the impact on the nature of the social relations between social workers and clients of social assistance, on the actual empowerment of both social workers and social assistance recipients, and on strengthening the paternalistic attitudes of social workers. The empirical research within the project included 29 in-depth interviews (IDI) with social workers and 30 with recipients in six locations (both rural and urban), analysis of the official reporting data on social assistance from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and a representative CATI (Computer As-

sisted Telephone Interview) survey with social workers who also perform managerial functions in Social Assistance Centres (SAC). In this article, we are using the CATI data and occasionally referring to other components of the project – those that mainly address the attitudes and opinions of social workers, and only to a limited extent allow conclusions about the objectively tangible realities of social welfare centres or the actual effects of social work.

The survey sample consisted of 350 interviews and was representative, accounting for the proportionate representation of SACs in all administrative regions (voivodships) in Poland, the number of social contracts per SAC per year estimated using data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' reporting system, the value of the local human development index (LHDI; see: Arak et. al., 2012) for the SAC location for the latest year available, and the SAC's borough characteristics (rural or urban, with differentiation of the city size).

In this article, we investigate how organisational factors and the attitudes of social workers toward conditionality impact the perceived empowerment of social assistance recipients. Thus, empowerment is assessed using three dependent variables representing psychological standing, social reintegration, and professional reintegration. The selection of variables follows an observation that empowerment is a complex phenomenon and takes place on various levels of increasing individual skills and competencies.

Psychological empowerment is understood as a set of enablers that increase intrinsic task motivations (Spreitzer, 1995), thus the first dependent variable was based on the question of whether social contracts were effective in strengthening the motivation and self-confidence of a given SACs' clients.

The second dependent variable was based on the question of whether social contracts were perceived as effectively increasing clients' professional capabilities. This relates to the concept used in business and management studies of increasing professional capabilities and control over one's goals, allowing for further professional development.

The third dependent variable was based on the question of whether social capabilities were increased thanks to the use of social contracts. Social capabilities are crucial components of empowerment, strengthening family resources while building resilience and social capital (Mokomane, 2012).

As the literature suggests, individual characteristics, such as education, beliefs, attitudes, and one's perception of organisational goals in community-based units such as social assistance centres, play an important role in understanding the role and meaning of empowerment, and related practices (Speer & Peterson, 2000; Raeymaeckers & Dierckx, 2013). Therefore, independent, explanatory variables shape the attitudes of social workers towards the role of social welfare institutions and, in particular, towards conditionality and activation; the experience of social workers; the level of their education; the type of social contract, and a SAC's economic environment.

We created an index of attitudes towards conditional benefits and workfare with the following queries: (1) if the respondent agreed that social assistance should teach that receiving assistance always entails certain obligations (on the beneficiaries part); (2) if the respondent agreed that as many benefits as possible should be dependent

upon the active attitude of the beneficiary; (3) if the respondent agreed with the statement that a social contract effectively decreases the number of poor people. Agreement with each of the above statements was given a value of 1. Next, binary variables were transformed into an ordinal variable of the number of statements with which a respondent agreed (values of 0 to 3). The higher the value of the variable, the more pro-workfare and pro-conditional the attitude was. The questions used for creating the index had been used earlier by Rymysza (2011) to assess the level of professionalisation of social work in Poland and the attitudes of social workers towards activation policy, and thus were repeated in our survey.

The attitudes of social workers might be related to the length of their professional careers and the richness of their experience at work. Social workers' experience was approximated by the number of years worked and their education level (higher vs. secondary, or lower education level).

Organisational characteristics and pro-active orientation within a SAC are represented by the type of activities offered to social welfare clients. The analysis of the official reporting data on social assistance (Sowa-Kofta, 2018) shows that the structure of the offer and activation measures (including conditional ones) used in social assistance centres varies across the country and that this differentiation is related to other elements of the institutional characteristics of social welfare centres (number of employees, available resources, amount of financing, etc.); therefore, the structure of activities offered provides a good approximation of a SAC's general proactive (or passive) orientation. Several variables were used to describe the frequency of use of specific activation measures that social contracts typically include and which are available for social workers to apply in accordance with the Act on Social Assistance. Activation measures include professional training, intervention works, public works, active job search via the public employment services (PES), psychological support as well as family, and childcare support. Each type of measure was expressed as a binary variable representing the frequency of using a given type of contract in a SAC (0 – never or rarely; 1 – often or always).

Finally, the external economic and social environment of the SAC was assessed by the unemployment rate and the size of the local settlement (urban vs. rural area); analyses carried out in the above-mentioned project, and based on the official social assistance reporting data prove that these two factors most strongly differentiate the ways in which social assistance centres operate in Poland, including the use of social contracts (Poławski, 2018; Sowa-Kofta, 2018).

Results

The analysis shows that an overwhelming majority of social workers presented an activating attitude, which – at the same time – points to the need for some sort of conditionality. Respondents agreed with the statements that conditionality is the driving force for the effectiveness of social assistance (Table 1). Almost all interviewed (99%) agreed that receiving welfare should be related to obligations, and 93% agreed upon the need for activation as a vital part of reintegration practice in social assistance. So-

cial contracts were evaluated as an effective mechanism for reducing poverty by 41% of respondents. When the conditionality index was analysed, slightly more than half of the respondents (53%) agreed with two of the above statements, and 40% with all three statements.

Table 1. Conditionality index

Agreement with the statement that	Number of responses	%	Index of attitudes towards conditionality and activation*	Number of responses	%
Social assistance should teach that welfare is related to obligations.	346	98.86	1 condition	21	6.00
As many benefits as possible should be dependent upon the clients' active attitude.	326	93.14	2 conditions	187	53.43
Social contract effectively leads to a decrease in the number of care recipients.	143	40.86	3 conditions	140	40.00

* only 2 respondents (0,57%) did not agree with any of the statements

The preliminary analysis included the sample characteristics and structure of the analysed variables. The mean value of the conditionality index was slightly higher among respondents who identified effective empowerment in all three dimensions: psychological, professional, and social (Table 2). Positive attitudes towards psychological and professional empowerment were observed among workers with fewer years of professional experience. Only concerning social empowerment, was the result reversed: the mean number of years of professional experience was higher among those who perceived social contracts as effective in increasing the social capabilities of recipients.

The means of the declared use of almost all types of professional and social reintegration instruments are higher in the case of lower perceived empowerment in almost all analysed dimensions, though differences in means were small. This would indicate that belief in the empowering features of the social contract is more present among those who use this instrument less frequently.

Social workers living and working in areas with higher unemployment rates on average perceive social contracts as more effective, particularly for professional empowerment. Contracts with social assistance beneficiaries are perceived as empowering in all three dimensions slightly more frequently by respondents with higher education and living in urban areas.

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample¹

Variable		Psychological empowerment		Professional empowerment		Social empowerment	
		no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Social workers' characteristics	index of attitudes towards conditionality and activation	2.113	2.411	2.155	2.415	2.211	2.386
	number of years worked by the social worker	36.886	22.542	33.843	22.534	22.931	26.652
Content of social contract	vocational training	2.529 ²	2.245	2.854	2.098	2.437	2.258
	intervention works	3.000	2.980	3.079	2.949	2.954	2.996
	public works	3.243	3.170	3.326	3.132	3.161	3.195
	job search via PES	2.471	2.296	2.383	2.316	2.379	2.318
	psychological support	2.829	2.387	2.921	2.316	2.701	2.403
	family and childcare support	2.943	2.549	2.854	2.551	2.885	2.542
Social and economic environment	unemployment rate	9.268	8.511	8.759	8.703	8.831	8.667
	frequencies	N (%)					
Social workers' education	higher	72 (26.28)	202 (73.72)	86 (31.39)	188 (68.61)	84 (30.66)	190 (69.34)
	lower than higher	25 (32.89)	61 (67.11)	30 (39.47)	46 (60.53)	30 (39.47)	46 (60.53)
Urbanisation level	urban	11 (25.00)	33 (75.00)	13 (29.55)	31 (70.45)	14 (31.82)	30 (68.18)
	semi-urban	21 (26.25)	59 (73.75)	25 (31.25)	55 (68.75)	25 (31.25)	55 (68.75)
	rural	65 (28.76)	161 (71.24)	78 (34.51)	148 (65.49)	75 (33.19)	151 (66.81)

¹ Where N stands for the number of responses.

² scale from 1 – always to 4 – never

Logistic regression points out that a higher value of the index of attitudes towards conditionality significantly and strongly correlated to the positive perception of psychological empowerment with the use of the social contract. There is also a positive relationship between the conditionality index and professional empowerment, though the relationship is not as strong.

The most pronounced relations are between the type of activity measure adopted within the social contract and the perceived empowering effect in a particular dimension (psychological, professional, or social). Activities aimed at family and childcare support, which include social contracts related to counselling, improving school attendance, or ensuring meals at home or school, are positively and strongly related to empowerment and expressed as improving life motivations. Undertaking vocational training, receiving psychological support, and activities focused on childcare and family support are positively related to empowerment in professional capabilities. Conducting a job search via public employment services was found to be negatively related to professional empowerment. Receiving family and childcare support was found to be significantly and positively associated with social empowerment.

Whilst controlling other factors, the experience of social workers as measured by years worked seemed to be insignificant in terms of explaining the perception of empowerment via the use of conditional benefits and activities. Similarly, the economic environment measured by the unemployment rate and urbanisation level was found to be insignificant.

Discussion

The results from our study show a very high level of normative support for conditional welfare arrangements, similar to the results of studies conducted in Nordic countries (Sadeghi & Terum, 2020; Sadeghi & Fekjær, 2019). The use of conditional policies in street-level practice is mild as behavioural requirements are set rather in relation to stimulating participation in programmes and activities enabling social, and eventually labour market reintegration rather than sanctions restricting access to social assistance benefits (Sadeghi & Terum 2020). In Poland, sanctions are, in fact, used rarely and reluctantly, and treated by social workers as a last resort – in situations when informal mechanisms of influence and behavioural control have failed (Poławski, 2018). In the realities of social welfare centres in the Nordic countries, sanctioning is not automatically mechanical either – as qualitative studies suggest, and if it takes place at all, it is preceded by a careful and complex interpretation of the client's situation and used in cases of unwillingness, and non-compliance rather than as a punishing mechanism (Vilhena, 2021, p. 427). However, the reasons for the mildness of conditionality seem to be slightly different in Nordic countries than in Poland. In Nordic countries conditionality is perceived from a human rights perspective and driven mostly by care and faith in people, serving as a tool to raise up claimants, and as a natural consequence of the enabling attitude in social work (Sadeghi & Terum, 2020; Vilhena, 2021). Findings of the qualitative part of our project show that in Poland social workers are driven by a need to educate clients and eventually find an agreement with them to persuade them to undertake proposed actions rather than using threats, which are seen as cumbersome by both parties involved (Trochymiak, 2018). Such a consensus-based rationality favours time- and resource-effective strategies for dealing with clients in the context of the constant budget shortages and work overload present in Polish social assistance, while also shaping the practice of poverty management in a way

that is not necessarily consistent with the formal requirements of activation policy and not necessarily consistent with the declarations of the social work ethos (see: Poławski, 2019).

There is a discrepancy between the pro-active and pro-conditional attitude expressed by social workers and the degree to which social work practice is characterised by the low uptake of social contracts. One of the reasons could be the controversial perception that social contracts are a poor inclusion mechanism (Rymsza, 2011). Social contracts are often seen as difficult for the clients, who might not keep to their terms, and for the social workers who need to closely monitor the progress of the empowerment process. In social work practice in Poland, there is a large spectrum of negotiations between the social worker and the client, including assessment of the client's actual potential for reintegration. Street-level practitioners also have a high level of discretionary power and rarely use the ultimate sanction of limiting or withdrawing financial support not only to protect the client and to secure the basic needs of her or his family but also to avoid time-consuming procedures prompting a potential administrative burden and investigation into the reasons for refusing benefits (Rymsza, 2011; Poławski, 2018, Trochymiak, 2018). Thus, the hypothesis that social workers have a proactive and pro-conditional attitude is reflected in a higher degree of perceiving social contracts to be effective and empowering is only partially confirmed, though the values adopted in social work organisations are important. As Rymsza (2011) points out, social work is perceived as a supportive and activating social service, but one which is cautious in assessing whether a client deserves or meets the criteria for support – including conditional benefits. On the other hand, the focus on obligations inherent in the politics of activation and conditionality is often contested by social workers, as it assumes a departure from therapeutic and case-oriented relations with beneficiaries (Ruch, 2010), and is perceived as inconsistent with the professional values and ethos of social work (Bieńko, 2012). Our analysis, in part, confirms these conclusions.

The professional experience of social workers measured in the number of working years seems to influence opinions regarding successful empowerment less than having pro-conditional and pro-activation attitudes, although younger workers tend to express more belief in the potential of the social contract for psychological empowerment. This could mean that social workers entering the profession express higher support for the welfare state, which might arise from a stronger internalisation of professional values and professional identity than older workers. The findings here are in line with a general observation that street-level workers seek congruity between the formal mission of the organisation and their own actions (Meyers & Lehmann Nielsen, 2012); the general support for welfare and activation among social workers is also recognised in the literature (see: Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2007). Differing interpretations of general norms are attributed primarily to the organisational context (Raeymaeckers & Dierckx, 2013) or to collective processes rooted in the managerial culture within organisations (Jacobsson et. al., 2020), while less often addressing the issue of frontline workers' professional experience or other individual characteristics. However, it is possible that social workers with more work experience, as with other people-oriented professionals (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) might show professional burnout

symptoms and – consequently – less faith in the purposefulness of their work. Stemming from a long-term work with difficult clients and in understaffed organisations, work that often is underestimated and undervalued in terms of both prestige and remuneration, burnout occurs quite commonly among Polish social workers and is thought to decrease the – actual and perceived – effectiveness of the work, and the chances for client empowerment (Janowska, 2018). Another possible explanation points to differences in the socialisation patterns of social workers. As Kaźmierczak (2012) suggests, patterns of interpreting social problems inherited from the communist era, which are still common in Polish social assistance, including paternalistic orientation and an emphasis on the use of protective measures aimed mainly at satisfying basic needs rather than activating, could be an element of a particular path-dependency shaping the organisational culture of social welfare centres as well as the system of vocational training, and professional socialisation of social workers. Inevitably, this path-dependency has less effect on younger employees, who have been more often brought up on models consistent with the EU patterns of activation policy.

At the same time, social workers tend to be very unified when it comes to planned and implemented activation measures in relation to the expected empowering results of the social contract. Declarations on the type of support provided are consistent with those on the expected type of empowerment resulting from the social contract, whether it increases life motivations, improvement of professional capabilities, or social skills. Support targeted at proper family functioning is related to empowerment in psychological and social dimensions, whilst support for job searches and vocational training is related to professional empowerment. This match can indicate a tendency to maximise the potential positive effects of contracts – despite the low level of belief in the effectiveness of contractual arrangements – and should be interpreted as an expression of a high level of internal organisational coherence. The above finding does not resolve the role of participation and personalising the process of establishing types of support and examining beneficiaries' freedom of choice in the process (Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Kaźmierczak, 2014). It could be that paternalistic attitudes and expectations held by social workers when selecting activities and programmes for reintegrated persons are mirrored in the expected empowerment results (Kaźmierczak, 2014; van Berkel, 2017). Kaźmierczak (2014) argues that the empowering potential of the social contract in Poland might be questioned as it too frequently becomes a social control tool, limiting individual freedom of choice between available types of support or benefits that cannot realistically be consciously evaluated by social welfare clients and truly agreed on between the social worker and the person applying for support.

Indeed, qualitative research undertaken on welfare conditionality in Poland shows that although establishing conditions for a social contract is presented as a participatory process, based more on mutual trust than on formal principles (Poławski, 2019), social workers show rather clear paternalistic tendencies and strongly direct their clients towards solutions, and activities they consider appropriate, and effective in individual situations, while not necessarily providing comprehensive information on the consequences and determinants of alternative solutions. Such practices are justified (by social workers) with the desire to maximise the chances of empowerment and activation (Sowa-Kofta, 2018). Despite the occurrence of paternalistic attitudes,

the use of sanctions seems to be the last choice solution as the rate of benefit refusal is very low, accounting for only 1.3% of all granted social assistance benefits, and these rarely include failure to meet the conditions of the social contract (Poławski, 2018). Thus, conditionality of conduct is, in practice, rarely exercised and social workers tend to believe that their decisions regarding activation measures are the best choice and have an empowering effect. Summing up, the fit between the type of activation mechanism and the empowerment field observed in the study represents some level of justified paternalism and potential empowerment, but with hardly any sanctions involved.

Labour market reintegration and professional empowerment seem to be best addressed within the above quantitative analysis. Numerous measures aimed at labour market reintegration, with the exception of job searching via public employment services, are found to increase the probability of perceived professional empowerment. It is worth highlighting, however, that labour market reintegration is a difficult empowerment process to sustainably achieve. Zalewski (2018) points out that social contracts often lead to employment, which is either temporary or precarious, and thus, typically combined with still receiving social benefits, which in turn, extends the dependency path while not fully reintegrating, and therefore, not meeting the expectations of the poor towards well-being and income. The lack of cooperation between social assistance and public employment services raises questions about the organisational structures and the match of reintegration measures to the actual labour market demand. Types of reintegration mechanisms might be selected by social workers according to their availability and the capabilities of the beneficiaries, not necessarily responding to labour market structures and demand, which is supported by the finding that economic conditions (i.e., the unemployment rate) are irrelevant for the perception of empowerment. One explanation of poor cooperation with public employment services, and the mismatch with labour market demand could be the trade-off between the labour market demand structure, and the SAC aims, with the risk of excluding more vulnerable clients from services when the latter is oriented only on labour market reintegration (van Berkel, 2020 after Ingold, 2018). The result might be also interpreted as a high belief in the empowering effect of one's own actions and limited trust in empowerment resulting from the activities of institutions.

The above study has some limitations. The selection of variables was driven by the content of the questionnaire and it is particularly difficult to express such complex features as conditionality and empowerment with quantitative variables. Also, not all dimensions of empowerment were evaluated equally. The adopted model of the analysis shows numerous correlates of professional and some correlates of psychological empowerment, but still little can be said about the correlates of social empowerment, leaving room for further studies. Although undertaking activities with the aim of social reintegration is a goal for over two-thirds of the social contracts in Poland, empowerment in terms of labour market reintegration seems to be better operationalised and more related to institutional features. As interviews with social managers show, social reintegration is at least as important as labour market reintegration but is frequently reached alongside other activities and as such might be less influenced by the organisational or occupational features tackled within this particular analysis (Sowa-Kofta, 2018). The study, while showing the importance of organisational attitudes, does not

provide information on the structure and characteristics of social work beneficiaries. The database that was analysed did not cover this type of information; however, future work could dig into the problems of empowerment, and particularly, the effectiveness of social work, taking into account the type of social problems that welfare beneficiaries are facing.

Conclusions

In summation, the above research gives an insight into the policy, organisational, and occupational contexts of understanding and implementing conditional benefits in Poland from the perspective of empowerment. From the policy point of view, it shows the importance of the normative acceptance of conditionality in social assistance, which is embedded in welfare policy even if not sufficiently expressed in social work practice. In terms of organisational structures, the analysis points to high-level coherence between the implemented types of conditional activities and expectations towards empowerment. Not all types of empowerment, however, are fully explained by the organisational and policy features included in the study, nor all are equally perceived as important consequences of conditionality.

In general, the research shows that normative support for conditionality and a shared belief in the activating character of social work elevates the potential for empowerment in social work practice. Behavioural conditionality is – in social workers' perception and experience – important for increasing beneficiaries' independence and self-sufficiency when professional capabilities and individual motivations are analysed. At the same time, it seems less important for empowerment in terms of proper functioning within social networks and social environments. In other words, perceived functions of conditionality towards empowerment seem to be selective and, to some extent, limited. Weak relations between a proactive attitude and social empowerment are, however, consistent with what we know about earlier findings on how social welfare has been functioning in Poland since the systemic transformation. Up to date, community social work seems to play a marginal role in social assistance; social workers focus on working with individuals, or – at best – with families and are not, as surveys show, particularly interested in taking up activities and professional roles related to activating local communities or animation, and local planning (Rymsza, 2012). Naturally, they are also not ready to support integrating their clients into social networks within local communities – including the use of conditional measures. The results of our research provide additional justification for possible reforms and actions in this regard. The analysis also points to a need for further research, specifically on empowerment in terms of increasing motivations and social inclusion, which are to a lower extent explained by institutional variables.

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*Suburbanisation of poverty?
Analysis of attitudes of social
assistance beneficiaries in rural
areas of the Masovian Voivodeship*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to identify the characteristics of social assistance care beneficiaries living in peri-metropolitan and peripheral rural areas of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship. Above all, it is an attempt to create a demographic and social profile of people in need of and benefiting from institutional support, living in suburban villages. The results of surveys conducted among beneficiaries of social assistance centres and

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among employees of social assistance organisational units from counties included in the Warsaw Capital Region (WCR) and in the Masovian Regional Region (MRR) were used. Suburban areas are characterised in the literature as those characterised by a high level of socio-economic development, while the characteristics of social assistance beneficiaries in the WCR area – only in this small research sample – indicate that they are people with long-term problems of poverty, unemployment, low income and low quality of life. The picture of social assistance beneficiaries operating in the ring of rural areas around Warsaw formulated here is a picture of people remaining in a particularly difficult social and professional situation. It is a picture of people who rely on external support in their daily lives for a long time.

Keywords: suburban areas, risk of poverty, peripheral rural areas, suburban poverty

Introduction

American sociologists point out that the connection between wealth and areas around large cities is so deeply rooted that the word “suburbs” has become synonymous with middle-class consumerism (Kneebone & Braube, 2013). Their stereotypical image in developed countries is that of a unified affluence and social homogeneity. In Poland, during and after the transformation period, villages around the largest cities became “places where the suburban utopia of the middle class was put into practice” (Leśniak-Rychlak, 2019, p. 11).

The turn of the 1990s and 2000s, saw the intensification of the process of suburbanisation and rural gentrification, that took place in the social structure of rural Poland. This was influenced by the growth of suburbs that occurred after 1989: “Although owning a single-family house in the Polish People’s Republic was not impossible, it remained reserved for the most privileged or entrepreneurial, i.e., party representatives and so-called private initiative, those with more financial capital than traditional rural residents” (Leśniak-Rychlak, 2019, p. 221). After 1989 suburban homes, tried to satisfy the housing needs of the Polish People’s Republic (PPR) era. They became one of the possibilities for achieving their own housing. As a result, part of society gained the opportunity to realise their dream of a house, along with values such as privacy, freedom, and a sense of security. Life in the countryside and in the suburbs, especially for representatives of the middle class, became an expression of high social status, enabling them to realise their housing aspirations and lifestyle².

² The popularity of suburban villages contributed to the deconstruction of the social image of rural areas. Previously mainly associated with agriculture and considered to be unexciting, suburban areas gradually became attractive territories, carriers of new dynamics. “Moving to the suburbs was an attractive housing model, responding, on the one hand, to the need for contact with nature (or imaginations about it), having one’s own garden, or the desire to raise children in a more friendly environment” (Drozda, 2017, p. 34). Research shows that contemporary migrations to (suburban) villages are also motivated by adapting the place of residence to growing needs in terms of living conditions and quality of life and are triggered by family changes resulting from the life cycle of migrants (see: Mantey, 2013; Kajdanek, 2011). These are

In suburban areas, both in Poland and other developed countries, the migrating group contains mainly young people. Their life cycle causes natural growth to be added to population growth caused by migration (Sadura et al., 2017). This is well illustrated in Poland by the case of communities located in the vicinity of Olsztyn, studied by Alina Żróbek-Róžańska and Elżbieta Zysk (2015). The researchers believe that “rejuvenation is defined as an increase in the share of people between the ages of 25 and 39 and their children up to the age of nine” (Żróbek-Róžańska & Zysk, 2015, p. 123). Based on this case study, it can be stated that “expanding cities are rejuvenating suburban areas” (Żróbek-Róžańska & Zysk, 2015, p. 123), and “this effect accumulates in rural (often suburban) areas that are most attractive in terms of housing” (Żróbek-Róžańska & Zysk, 2015, p. 134).

Areas surrounding metropolitan terrains are characterised as moving away from agriculture. It is being replaced by the development of services, indicating the dependence of these economies on nearby cities and metropolises (Marini & Mooney, 2006). In these rapidly changing units, a progressive transformation into residential areas can also be observed; farms disappear, and those that continue to operate are no longer focused on breeding. Local businesses in these areas focus on servicing a large city, where most residents work. Unemployment is almost non-existent, and human capital, measured by both education level and middle-class affiliation, is high (Halamska, 2018). The social structure is linked to the economy. Representatives of the middle class are significant there. Important elements complementing the new social structure are numerous service workers and labourers. In this type of unit, the education level is high, as is the share of the population with higher degrees.

One of the most important aspects that describe the state and dynamics of the local socio-economic situation is the level of unemployment³. In communities around metropolitan areas, the percentage of unemployed individuals among the working-age population is lower than that observed on a national scale and significantly lower than in peripheral communities (Zwęglińska-Gałecka, 2022). Many communities located far from urban centres are mainly agricultural areas, where the problem is low productivity in agriculture (still to some extent connected with hidden unemployment) and lacking non-agricultural employment. Another measure that, alongside unemployment, describes the socio-economic situation of the local community is the scale of social assistance use. This is illustrated by the percentage of individuals in families receiving social assistance in the total population. “Criteria for using this type of assistance are, on the one hand, criteria of low material status (insufficient income in the family), and on the other hand, additional circumstances that, alongside low income, indicate entitlement to social assistance” (Grewiński, 2013, p. 8). In communities located in the vicinity of large cities, the share of individuals receiving social assistance in the total

accompanied by declarations of the need for peace and quiet and the desire to have one’s own home.

³ The term unemployment as used here has the following definition: “unemployed are individuals of working age (in Poland, the working age is defined as 18–59 years for women and 18–64 years for men), who are capable and willing to work under typical conditions in the economy, but are without work despite actively searching for employment” (Krasiuk, 2009, p. 91).

population is over 40% lower than in peripheral communities, and in many of them, this indicator reaches values one-third lower than its value for the whole of Poland (Zwęglińska-Galecka, 2022). A significant proportion of individuals receiving social assistance also signals a high level of social exclusion and poverty. In peripheral communities, more than in those located near large cities, due to existing socio-economic needs, social benefits (both financial and material) are an essential element allowing for functioning and preventing exclusion (see: Kalinowski, 2014), and at the micro level, they constitute an important supplement to the household budget.

According to Eurostat⁴, in 2016, almost one-fourth of residents of large cities (23.6%) in the European Union were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This was less than the case for rural areas (25.5%), but more than among residents of smaller towns and suburbs (21.6%) seen as stable, developed places to live for wealthy, young, educated residents. In Poland and other Central European countries, suburban and near-metropolitan areas are still generally characterised as vibrant spaces, attractive for living and investing. Their significant vitality (social and economic) enables them to overcome problems and function as relatively independent entities that can survive without significant external support.

However, in literature, particularly in the United States and more often in Great Britain, a different image of suburbs also emerges, where poverty becomes a new element. Some authors use the term “suburbanisation of poverty” (see: Allard & Roth, 2016), whereas others speak of the decentralisation of poverty (Kavanagh et al., 2016). Regardless of the term used, it is described as an unfortunate element of the country’s economic landscape, which is becoming increasingly visible even in the (wealthy and homogenous) suburbs. The complex and multi-faceted character of suburbanisation of poverty (as well as the process of the very suburbanisation) is reflected in the ways of defining it and its theoretical interpretations. Economic changes have largely affected poor and low-income Americans, often immigrants, causing poverty to spread from cities to suburbs. As this trend continues, new ways of providing economic assistance to ease the growing impact of poverty in suburban areas arise⁵.

Suburbanisation of poverty is a concept rather than a theoretical framework. In Poland, this topic has not been methodically discussed so far. The aim of our study is to recognise it. We want to discuss the characteristics of social assistance beneficiaries in the peri-metropolitan and peripheral areas of Masovia. The term suburbanisation of poverty highlights the phenomenon of poverty shifting from urban areas to the suburbs, challenging the conventional perception of poverty as primarily an urban issue. It suggests that poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated in suburban communities. The term suburbanisation of poverty emerged in response to the growing

⁴ See more: Departament Analiz Ekonomicznych i Prognoz Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2018.

⁵ Research on poverty (e.g., Kneebone & Braube, 2013; Ehrlich, 2015) has typically focused on inner-city neighbourhoods, where poverty and its accompanying unemployment are most visible. As a result, American anti-poverty policy has focused mainly on improving the situation of the poor or at risk of poverty or social exclusion in urban (and often rural, peripheral) areas. Meanwhile, suburbs are generally perceived as places where high-quality schools, safe neighbourhoods, and good jobs can be found.

evidence of rising poverty rates as well as social and economic challenges in suburban areas. Traditionally, suburbs were seen as prosperous and affluent, characterised by middle-class residents. However, in recent decades, there has been a significant increase in poverty and social disadvantage in suburban areas. Studies on the suburbanisation of poverty highlight the need to recognise and address poverty in the outskirts, including the unique challenges faced by suburban residents and the necessity for tailored policy responses. By understanding the suburbanisation of poverty, policymakers and researchers can better address the needs of low-income individuals and families living in suburban areas and develop strategies to alleviate poverty there. In Western researchers' publications, the increase in suburban poverty is outlined as one of the most significant trends that can characterise cities and their surrounding areas in the 21st century (McGhee, 2018). Analyses from the Washington-based Brookings Institute reveal that a transformation occurs around some American cities (including San Francisco, Cleveland, Chicago, and Seattle): suburbs and villages are changing their character, no longer being enclaves of the middle class but becoming symbols of contemporary American poverty. Data show that 16.9 million American suburbs residents live in poverty – more than in cities or rural communities (Kneebone & Braube, 2013, p. 102). Suburban areas are currently places of residence for the largest and fastest-growing population of the poor in the country. Similar processes are observed in Great Britain. It is estimated that 6.8 million people live in poverty in the suburbs of England and Wales, which constitutes 57% of all people living in squalor (Hunter, 2014). Between 2001 and 2011, the number of suburban residents who had to live below the poverty level increased by 34%. This is also accompanied by an increase in the number of households whose residents have lost their jobs. Overall, during the period from 2001 to 2011, suburbs became poorer compared to inner-city areas. Despite the appearance of suburbanisation of poverty, suburban neighbourhoods in many countries still remain primarily places of residence for wealthy members of the middle class (Charmes & Keil, 2015; Musterd et al., 2016). Therefore, it should be assumed that the aforementioned phenomenon occurs alongside ongoing processes of urban sprawl, counter-urbanisation, or rural gentrification (Markley, 2018; Pacoud & Mace, 2018). The overlap of these processes and phenomena leads to greater heterogeneity of suburban populations. An example is the study of the Dutch suburb of Almere, where poverty appeared as one of the consequences of the diversity of the local community's social structure, in addition to residents in middle-class professional positions, career-oriented to work in Amsterdam, people occupying lower positions in the social and professional structure frequently moved to the suburbs from other peripheral areas (see: Tzaninis & Boterman, 2018).

The examples cited do not necessarily mean that the suburbs of the largest American or British cities (and certainly also other countries) will become enclaves for the poor, but these analyses, on the one hand, draw attention to the process of crumbling and differentiating of poverty, and on the other hand, to the fragmentation and diversification of the suburbs. This poses a challenge in conceptualising and defining what the phenomenon or process of suburbanisation of poverty actually means. It can be expected that further findings by researchers may bring new challenges for decision-makers designing social policies.

Research characteristics

The article aims to identify the characteristics of social assistance clients living in rural areas of the Masovian Voivodeship and particular attention will be paid to around the metropolitan areas. We want to outline the demographic and social profile of people in need using institutional support living in suburban and peripheral villages of the region. Our analysis can complement the picture of suburban areas in Poland, which are characterised by a favourable demographic structure, (relatively) good spatial accessibility, good housing conditions, and a high level of development of the non-agricultural sector of the economy (see: Stanny et al., 2018). We will focus on describing people who have been overlooked in the national literature on rural urbanisation processes, suburbanisation, or rural gentrification so far (or when the problems of these people were only signalled). The results of our analysis also show another dimension of rural poverty differentiation: not the one stereotypically associated with problematic, marginalised areas, but, on the contrary, the one that occurs in highly developed rural locations⁶.

In setting the background for our analysis, we want to draw attention to the fact that in the last decade in Poland, the difference in the number of benefits received in rural and urban areas was decreasing (see: Chart 1). The decrease in the number of benefits granted in recent years is due to reforms in social policy, among other things, as well as changes in the interests of benefit recipients in connection with the “Rodzina 500+” child benefit programme. The decrease in the number of benefits granted does not refer to a decrease in the appearance of poverty and social exclusion. Rural residents are among the groups most at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion (Kalinowski, 2022). The gradual convergence of the number of benefits granted in cities and rural areas indicates a similarity in the needs of beneficiaries based on their place of residence. This phenomenon occurs regardless of the reason for granting the benefit. This means a decrease in the importance of the place of residence as a factor that makes a household require intervention from social assistance centres.

Poverty itself as a multidimensional phenomenon is strongly diverse due to the character of the needs of a given area (see: Figure 1). The latest available nominal data (2022) indicate that most families receiving social assistance benefits live in the Masovian Voivodeship (87.8 thousand families, including 31.6 thousand in rural areas). However, in relation to 1,000 people, the most benefits are granted in the Eastern part of the country, in the North, and in the Northwest. As Stanny and his collaborators (2018) indicate, this is due, among others, to the low level of de-agrarisation and low concentration of capital, as well as the difficult situation after the liquidation of state collective farms (Pol. *Państwowe gospodarstwo rolne*, PGR).

Our analysis is based on the results of research conducted in the project entitled *Conducting a study on the causes of poverty in the Masovian Voivodeship based on the prepared methodological report and developing a Programme to Counter Poverty and*

⁶ Sławomir Kalinowski points out that “rural residents face different problems depending on the province (in Eastern Poland, the main problem is an aging population and the flight of young people to cities, in the North, the still difficult situation after the liquidation of state-owned farms) or the degree of distance from large urban areas” (2022, p. 58).

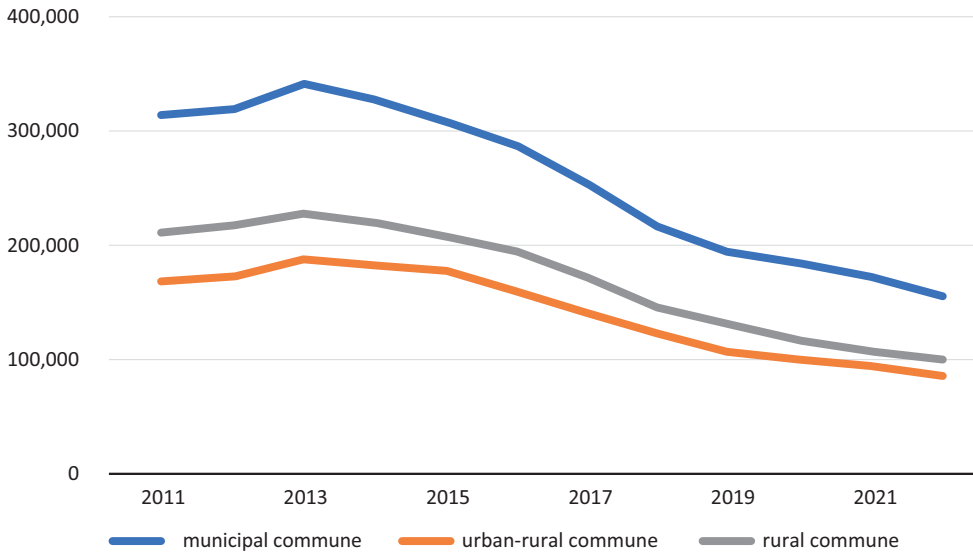


Figure 1. Social assistance benefits by commune type

Source: Based on the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy materials (2022)

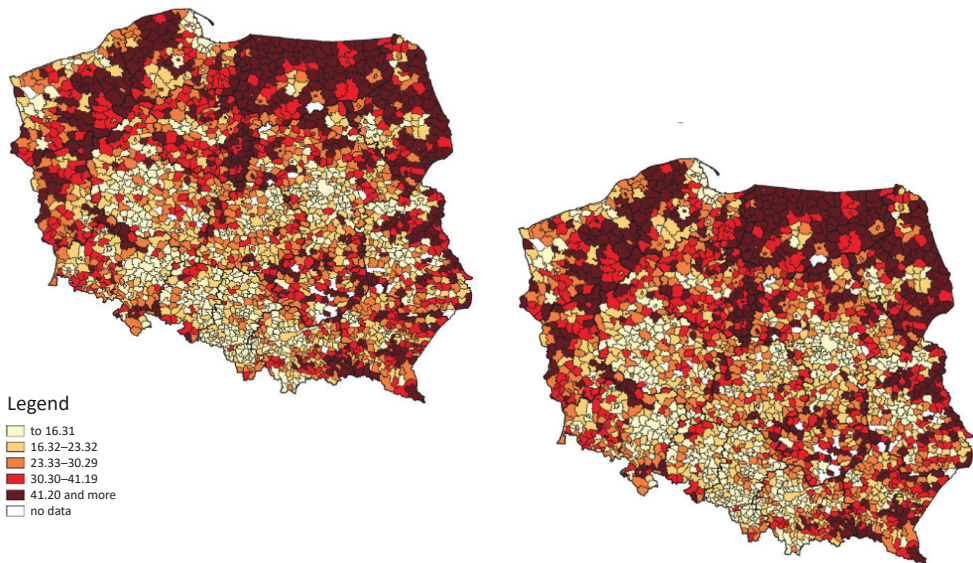


Figure 2. Benefits granted per 1,000 inhabitants of the commune, regardless of the reason, in 2022

Source: Based on the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy materials (2022)

Social Exclusion in the Masovian Voivodeship for the years 2023–2026 (project number 3/MCPS/05/2022/B/BS). The research was conducted between June and July, 2022. It was carried out among beneficiaries of social assistance centres and employees of social assistance centres. In this study, the results of individual questionnaire interviews were used: PAPI, CATI – for beneficiaries, and CAWI – for employees.

The research under the mentioned project was conducted in all counties of the Masovian Voivodeship divided into two NUTS2 units: the Warsaw Capital Region and the Masovian Regional Region. For the purposes of this study, we have decided to focus on rural areas. We would like to pay particular attention to the suburban areas around Warsaw. However, due to the small number of respondents from these areas, we will also indicate the characteristics of respondents from rural areas of the rest of the voivodeship. Analyses were carried out comparatively between suburban areas belonging to the Warsaw Capital Region (WCR, which consists of the following counties: grodziski, legionowski, miński, nowodworski, otwocki, piaseczyński, pruszkowski, warszawski zachodni, and wołomiński) and rural peripheral areas of the Mazowieckie region (MRR: białobrzegi, ciechanowski, garwoliński, gostyniński, grójecki, kozienicki, lipski, łosicki, makowski, mławski, ostrołęcki, ostrowski, płocki, płoński, przasnyski, przysuski, pułtusi, radomski, siedlecki, sierpecki, sochaczewski, sokołowski, szydłowiecki, węgrowski, wyszkowski, żuromiński, zwoleński, and żyrardowski).

The general picture of the situation in these regions, both in the voivodeship and the country, is good⁷. These data illustrate the risk of poverty. In the WCR area, no more than one in 10 residents are at risk of poverty. This indicator is twice as high in the remaining part of the Masovian Regional Region (MRR) region. In the MRR area, almost every fourth resident is at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁸. Additionally, in 2021, in the Warsaw Capital Region, there were 17.21 people receiving various benefits per 1,000 residents, while in the Masovian Regional area, there were 29.26 people receiving benefits.

Only respondents living in rural areas were included in the analysis prepared for the purposes of this article. Their number included 78 beneficiaries of social assistance in the WCR and 312 in the MRR⁹. Two-thirds of the beneficiaries have been receiving social assistance for more than two years, which means they dominate the surveyed population. Obviously, this small, non-representative sample does not allow us to generalise the results to the entire population. However, in our opinion, it is possible to highlight certain issues such as the level of education or the needs of social assistance beneficiaries.

⁷ A comprehensive characterisation of the WCR (Warsaw Capital Region) can be found in the study by IRMiR titled *Region Warszawski Stołeczny na tle województwa mazowieckiego* (Eng. The Warsaw Capital Region in comparison to the Masovian Voivodeship), (Jarczewski & Sykała, 2020).

⁸ See more: Kalinowski et al., 2022.

⁹ In the indicated project, the respondents came from all counties of the Masovian voivodeship. The study sample consisted of 1,057 beneficiaries of assistance and 458 employees of social assistance centres.

Table 1. Number of people in the WCR and in the MRR

Country	Total number of inhabitants	Total number of rural inhabitants	Number of people who were granted a total benefit by decision (% of benefits in rural areas)	Number of beneficiaries of Social Assistance Centre in rural areas
Warsaw Capital Region	1,385,725	662,943	54,127 (48.4%)	78
Masovian Regional Region	2,257,017	977,780	62,950 (56.7%)	312

Source: Based on MCPS (2022), Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2022), and Statistics Poland (GUS) (2020, 2021) data

The responses of the benefit recipients are complemented by the opinions of social assistance centre employees. The number of employees in the RWS was small (22 people), every fifth respondent held a managerial position, half of those surveyed were social workers, and the rest were employed in specialist positions. In the MRR number of surveyed employees was 154. Also here one-fifth were managers of social assistance centres, 40% were social workers, the rest were specialists. The collected data creates a picture of the social and financial situation of social assistance centre beneficiaries, the conditions of individual types of poverty (including subjective poverty), and the effectiveness of the received assistance. Their comparison with the opinions of social assistance centre employees contributes to the description of the characteristics of people receiving social assistance in suburban, developed rural areas, and in peripheral rural areas. In addition, the responses of social assistance beneficiaries were compared with the responses of all beneficiaries (total 1,057 people) in the Masovia – this serves as a kind of reference point for analysis.

Characteristics of the studied population: beneficiaries of social assistance in suburban and peripheral rural areas

In the studied group of social assistance beneficiaries living in rural areas of the WCR, almost two-thirds were women. Over half of the respondents were over 55 years old: one-third were aged between 55 and 64, and one-fifth were 65 or older. The third-largest group included respondents aged between 35 and 44. Younger respondents were not well represented in the sample. These proportions correspond to the share of different age groups of beneficiaries in the entire rural social assistance area. The sample was mostly represented by people with low levels of education: pri-

mary and vocational. Almost half of the respondents were single-person households, and almost three out of four respondents did not have children to support. Slightly more than half of the respondents have a certificate of disability.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the study population

Socio-demographic characteristics	Rural areas of the WCR	Rural areas of the MRR	Masovian Voivodeship
Gender:			
<input type="checkbox"/> female	60.3%	73.1%	63.5%
<input type="checkbox"/> male	39.7%	26.9%	36.5%
Age:			
<input type="checkbox"/> up to 34	6.4%	18.3%	10.7%
<input type="checkbox"/> 35–44	20.5%	31.1%	24.6%
<input type="checkbox"/> 45–54	15.4%	18.9%	20.7%
<input type="checkbox"/> 55–64	35.9%	22.1%	28.0%
<input type="checkbox"/> 65 and older	21.8%	9.6%	16.0%
Education:			
<input type="checkbox"/> higher	2.6%	4.2%	4.8%
<input type="checkbox"/> secondary and post-secondary	21.8%	31.8%	35.5%
<input type="checkbox"/> vocational	41.0%	32.5%	28.9%
<input type="checkbox"/> elementary and high school	34.6%	31.5%	30.7%
Household size:			
<input type="checkbox"/> single	46.2%	25.3%	41.8%
<input type="checkbox"/> double	21.8%	16.7%	18.4%
<input type="checkbox"/> triple	15.4%	11.9%	13.2%
<input type="checkbox"/> quadruple and more	16.7%	46.2%	26.6%
Are there children in the household of the subject:			
<input type="checkbox"/> yes	29.5%	58.7%	40.9%
<input type="checkbox"/> no	70.5%	41.3%	59.1%
Does the subject require constant care from family or relatives?			
<input type="checkbox"/> yes	16.7%	9.9%	13.1%
<input type="checkbox"/> no	83.3%	90.1%	86.9%
Does the examined person have a disability certificate?			
<input type="checkbox"/> yes	57.7%	29.2%	44.0%
<input type="checkbox"/> no	42.3%	70.8%	56.0%

Source: Based on MCPS data (2022)

The above data reveals a rather stereotypical image of people in need of support: those who are poorly educated, lonely, and with a larger proportion being women. These characteristics have already been identified in many studies as increasing the risk of social exclusion in many dimensions of social life (Pokrzywa, 2019). What varies the studied sample from the characteristics identified in other studies is age. In this study, social assistance recipients are people in the upper age limit cohort of the working age or in the post-working age. While data from the Central Statistical Office (2020) indicated that the smallest proportion of social assistance beneficiaries nationwide is precisely the group of people in the post-working age¹⁰.

MRR beneficiaries have slightly different characteristics. Also here, the surveyed beneficiaries are a highly feminised group: their share reaches three-quarters of the surveyed population. In the MRR, beneficiaries are younger, as many as half are under the age of 44, and one-fifth are under the age of 34. In the MRR, the share of beneficiaries by education level is more proportional: slightly more respondents are those with vocational education. Also different from the WCR are the household sizes. In the MRR, the share of large, numerous households is the highest. This is due to the fact that, according to the declaration, two-thirds of the respondents have children. There is also a slightly larger share of people who are independent and do not require constant family care. Compared to the WCR, there is a smaller share of people who do not have a disability certificate. However, as indicated in the literature, in developed countries, people in need of support are primarily unemployed or inactive in their profession as well as those with inadequate or no education. These not only make it difficult to find work but also, through the negative impact on worker productivity, contribute to low wages (Kalinowski, 2018). In the European Union, people in the post-working age group are not among the most affected by poverty. However, in Poland, older people are in a different situation. As Eurostat data from 2018 show, the values of the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion indicator¹¹ are higher for people of post-working age than in the group of people of working age (Kurowska, 2008; Szarfenberg et al., 2010).

The position of respondents in the labour market is illustrated by the subsequent analysed data. The surveyed beneficiaries of social assistance living in rural areas of the WCR are largely unemployed. To the question: "Have you had a job in the last week?" only 15% of them answered affirmatively. According to them, only three people (4% of all respondents) worked full-time, the remaining respondents declared that they worked between 10 and 20 hours a week, including two people performing socially useful work, which is both a form of employment and receiving help¹².

¹⁰ See more: Central Statistical Office (GUS), 2020.

¹¹ *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion* includes the AROPE at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion indicator, which is the main index for monitoring the EU 2030 target on poverty and social exclusion. The set also includes three components of AROPE, namely, the at-risk-of-poverty rate (AROP), the rate of people living in households with very low work intensity (LWI) as well as the rate of severe material, and social deprivation (SMSD) (Eurostat, 2018).

¹² Socially useful work is an instrument of the labour market, which is intended for unemployed people without the right to unemployment benefits, using social assistance benefits (including persons participating in a social contract, individual self-empowerment program, local

Non-profit sources are the main sources of livelihood for the respondents – for as many as four out of five in the WCR and two-thirds of MRR respondents. The answers of the respondents indicate that among them, the most significant are allowances, donations, and other social assistance benefits. They were frequently indicated as both the main and additional sources of livelihood in these two types of rural areas. It should be emphasised, however, that more than half of the respondents do not have an additional source of income. Let us also note the disparity between the number of people working in the two types of rural areas. The proportion of workers is significantly higher in the MRR than in the WCR.

Table 3. Occupational situation of the surveyed population

Main source of income	Rural areas of the WCR	Rural areas of the MRR	Masovian Voivodeship
allowances, donations, alimony, social assistance	82.4%	60.3%	65.6%
old-age pension	7.8%	8.3%	12.5%
pension	3.9%	5.8%	7.0%
work: hired, casual, illegal, in agriculture, social work	5.9%	25.6%	14.9%

Source: Based on MCPS data (2022)

The group being studied differs in terms of income: the majority earn less than 1,000 PLN, with the proportion of this group being higher in the WCR. The other groups of people reaching certain income thresholds were almost equally represented in the surveyed population. A significant majority, four out of five respondents in the WCR and nine out of 10 interviewees in the MRR, also indicated that they have no savings. The main reasons for the lack of savings were cited as low income and unemployment. Additionally, over half of those who have savings reported a decrease in their collected money over the past year.

social assistance program or individual social employment program, if they have taken part in this form as a result of the referral of the county labour office pursuant to Article 50(2) of the Act of 20 April 2004 on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions). Work can be performed up to 10 hours a week in the municipality where the beneficiary lives. They are organised by the commune in organisational units of social assistance, organisations, or institutions statutorily dealing with charity or for the benefit of the local community. The person takes up work as a result of a referral by the head of a county (Pol. *starosta*), and up to 60% of the benefit is reimbursed from the Labour Fund.

Income, as expected, is associated with the material situation, and two-thirds of those surveyed rated their material situation as poor or very poor. Besides AROPE¹³, one of the measures of subjective poverty in the European Union is the indicator of severe material and social deprivation (SMSD)¹⁴. It identifies the lack of the possibility to fulfil seven out of 13 essential needs that an average person considers desirable or even necessary for life (six related to the individual and seven related to the household). In the surveyed group, the SMSD was 73.07, which is higher than the average for the whole country (71.5), the metropolitan area, and Masovia (67.9).

Individual needs are fulfilled to varying degrees, with a distinct character for each household (see: Table 4). The most frequently met needs in the WCR include timely payment of housing-related fees, repayment of instalments, and loans (by over two-thirds of those surveyed), and heating the apartment according to needs (by over half of those surveyed). Needs related to owning a car, replacing damaged furniture (by less than 10% of the respondents), and covering unexpected expenses (by over 5%) were met to the smallest extent. None of those surveyed indicated the possibility of paying for a weekly trip for household members to go on vacation once a year.

In addition, it can be noted that nearly one-third of those surveyed sometimes cannot afford to buy food, and 15% do not satisfy all needs related to housing, clothing, and food (see: Dudek, 2019). The financial situation of one in five people does not allow for satisfying needs related to health, culture, and education. The same percentage of those surveyed can meet current needs, but their financial situation requires them to save and be economical. Nearly one-fifth of those surveyed are in debt due to rent payments, fees, loans, or other obligations, with no reason occurring noticeably more often than the others.

In rural areas of the MRR, the majority (more than half) of social assistance beneficiaries can meet a significant part of the needs indicated below. The smallest percentage of respondents can afford to pay for a weekly holiday trip for household members once a year and replacement of damaged furniture. The share of people who can afford unexpected expenses is also small, this is probably due to the fact that the majority of respondents do not have any savings. Another aspect directly related to poverty is the perception of one's own household in terms of being poor. Almost four-fifths of the respondents in the WCR declare that they have experienced a situation that can be considered as "living in poverty". Almost the same number of people indicated that they often or always feel this way. Respondents in the MRR have slightly different feelings. Those less frequently (28.2% vs. 41.0% in the WCR) declared that their situation could be called living in poverty.

¹³ At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, for further reference please see footnote no. 9.

¹⁴ The measurement of values in the European Union is carried out within the "Income and Living Conditions" database, a set of statistical indicators based on EU statistics regarding income and living conditions (EU-SILC). The field includes the following topics: people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, inequalities, income distribution, poverty, living conditions, and material deprivation as well as ad hoc EU-SILC modules organised into sets of indicators concerning specific topics.

Table 4. Financial situation of the surveyed population

Financial situation		Rural areas of the WCR	Rural areas of the MRR	Masovian Voivodeship
What is the total income in the household of the respondent (income “on hand”)				
<input type="checkbox"/> 0–1,000 PLN		42.3%	27.1%	42.6%
<input type="checkbox"/> 1,001–2,000 PLN		23.1%	21.7%	23.6%
<input type="checkbox"/> 2,001–3,000 PLN		17.9%	20.7%	16.3%
<input type="checkbox"/> 3,001 PLN and more		20.5%	30.4%	17.5%
Does the respondent have savings:				
<input type="checkbox"/> yes		14.1%	9.6%	7.2%
<input type="checkbox"/> no		85.9%	90.4%	92.8%
Has the respondent ever been in a situation that could be considered “living in poverty”?				
<input type="checkbox"/> never and almost never		20.5%	26.9%	22.5%
<input type="checkbox"/> sometimes		38.5%	44.9%	43.2%
<input type="checkbox"/> often and always		41.0%	28.2%	34.2%
Index of severe material and social deprivation				
1.	Timely payment of fees related to the apartment, repayment of instalments, and loans	67.9%	75.3%	69.3%
2.	Heating the apartment according to needs	51.3%	64.7%	68.3%
3.	Consumption of meat, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every other day	43.6%	65.7%	55.0%
4.	Having at least two pairs of properly fitted footwear appropriate to the season	43.6%	74.4%	67.8%
5.	Internet access	35.9%	65.7%	59.5%
6.	Replacing worn clothes with new ones	30.8%	58.3%	50.6%
7.	Spending a small amount of money once a week on your own needs	26.9%	40.7%	38.5%
8.	Meeting friends/family for a meal/drink at least once a month	21.8%	45.2%	38.2%

9.	Regular participation in various leisure activities	19.2%	23.7%	24.5%
10.	Replacement of damaged furniture	8.9%	13.5%	11.9%
11.	Owning a car	8.9%	34.3%	18.2%
12.	Covering unexpected expenses	5.1%	16.3%	12.7%
13.	Paying for a weekly holiday trip for household members once a year	0.0%	11.8%	9.0%

Source: Based on MCPS data (2022)

It is worth noting the way in which the respondents perceive the level of income that would allow them to live at a moderate standard (taking into account the subjectivity of this term, see Table 5). To some extent, this data can be interpreted as the financial aspirations of the respondents. Attention should be paid to the two largest groups: every fourth respondent in the WCR indicated that an average standard of living for their household would be ensured by income ranging between 1,000 and 2,000 PLN, while the same number of respondents indicated a higher amount, above 4,000 PLN. One-third of respondents indicated income levels within the middle of the scale, between 2,000 and 4,000 PLN. In MRR, 40% of respondents live at an average level and need around PLN 4,000 per month. The share of other indications was correspondingly lower, the exception being the few beneficiaries who indicated an income not exceeding PLN 1,000.

Table 5. Perception of the desired financial situation of the surveyed population

What amount of income, according to the respondent, allows you to live on an average level (amount for a household)	Rural areas of the WCR	Rural areas of the MRR	Masovian Voivodeship
0–1,000 PLN	3.9%	2.2%	1.9%
1,001–2,000 PLN	25.7%	12.2%	20.8%
2,001–3,000 PLN	16.8%	15.4%	26.1%
3,001–4,000 PLN	18.0%	12.2%	17.4%
4,001 PLN and more	27.0%	43.6%	20.0%
uncertain	7.8%	14.4%	13.7%

Source: Based on MCPS data (2022)

Differences in perceptions of income and living standards were observed, for example, in the percentage of people unable to determine the amount necessary to maintain their household at a certain level. Levels were defined as “making ends meet” (which could be subjectively perceived as either the minimum or necessary level), modest, moderate, and high. In the case of a high standard of living, almost one-fifth of those surveyed (in both types of rural areas) were unable to determine the necessary amount.

Perception of social assistance activities in two types of rural areas

Participants were also asked to indicate their assessment of the activities of social assistance centres and the available forms of assistance for those in need. A very high percentage of people in the WCR and in the MRR rated the actions of social assistance centres, whose services they use, as good (the sum of responses of good and very good). A bit in contrast, which is indicated by the respondents' lower scores, are the respondents' answers regarding the assessment of the state's activities.

In the WCR the respondents rated financial assistance and material aid the highest on a five-point scale. The assistance offered in the form of training and counselling was rated the lowest by respondents, which may be surprising given that four-fifths of those surveyed are unemployed. It is also worth noting that almost 40% of people believe that the help obtained from the social assistance centre within the next year will not allow them to improve their difficult life situation.

The respondents were also asked to assess a catalogue of changes that could be made to ensure that the assistance offered is effective and tailored to the needs of social assistance beneficiaries. The table below (Table 6) shows the two statements that were rated the highest and the other two that were rated very low by the participants. The first group includes statements suggesting that monetary and material benefits should be increased. The second group, the low-rated ones, includes ideas related to labour market activity: securing jobs and improving the vocational skills of social assistance beneficiaries.

In the MRR, the answers were analogous. It is noteworthy that among the five most numerous indications was “access to free medical care”. This draws attention to the specificity of peripheral rural areas, which includes limited access to basic services. This indication is somewhat surprising in the context of the fact that it did not appear in the WCR, where one in five respondents was over 65 years of age, and 70% of them have a disability certificate. It must be also noted that metropolitan areas tend to have greater access to various resources, such as jobs, health services, educational institutions, and transport infrastructure. Therefore, beneficiaries of social assistance in metropolitan areas may have higher expectations regarding financial support, but also other services and development opportunities.

Table 6. Evaluation of received forms of assistance

Social assistance	Rural areas of the WCR	Rural areas of the MRR	Masovian Voivodeship
Evaluation of the operation of a social assistance centre: <input type="checkbox"/> good and very good <input type="checkbox"/> neither good nor bad <input type="checkbox"/> definitely wrong and wrong	85.9% 10.3% 3.8%	82.1% 14.1% 3.8%	80.5% 14.6% 4.9%
Evaluation of the state's operation to improve the situation of beneficiaries' household: <input type="checkbox"/> good and very good <input type="checkbox"/> neither good nor bad <input type="checkbox"/> definitely wrong and wrong	41.0% 35.9% 23.1%	34.3% 41.7% 24.3%	34.8% 32.7% 32.5%
Rating of top five forms of assistance:	cash benefits, financial assistance, housing assistance, in-kind assistance, disseminating information on the possibility of using various forms of assistance by people in need	cash benefits, financial assistance, in-kind assistance, assistance for housing purposes, increasing access to free medical services	cash benefits, financial assistance, in-kind assistance, assistance for housing purposes, disseminating information on the possibility of using various forms of assistance by people in need
The most effective forms of assistance, according to the respondents: <input type="checkbox"/> benefits in the form of cash should be increased <input type="checkbox"/> in-kind aid should be increased The least effective forms of assistance according to the respondents: <input type="checkbox"/> one's job should be secured by the state <input type="checkbox"/> more training and further education opportunities would offer better chances of improving one's situation	4.6 4.3 2.9 2.8	4.5 4.3 3.1 3.5	4.6 4.3 3.1 3.1

Source: Based on MCPS data (2022)

The employees of organisational units of social assistance institutions were asked, first of all, to indicate to what extent the assistance provided by social assistance centres is effective. The respondents rated the effectiveness of support in overcoming crisis situations the highest, followed by overcoming poverty and integration into the labour market. Therefore, in their opinion, the assistance provided is of interventionist nature.

Secondly, the respondents were asked, just like the beneficiaries, to indicate the most and least effective forms of assistance. In the WCR, cash benefits were among the most effective forms of assistance. Financial benefits were also highly rated by beneficiaries, who, as already mentioned, believed that their amounts should be increased. According to the surveyed social assistance centre employees, disseminating information about available forms of support among those in need is also highly effective. In the MRR, the answers were different. Here, employees paid attention to the high efficiency of providing a free, hot meal, and helping the elderly in running a household. In this case, there seems to be more emphasis and hope for greater effectiveness in non-monetary assistance.

According to the surveyed employees of social assistance centres, the least effective forms of assistance in the WCR are supported in the form of cheap transportation and access to cheap communal and social housing. In MRR, they were providing access to cheap municipal and social housing and free Internet.

The employees of social assistance centres were also asked about who, besides authorised persons, benefits from the assistance offered by these institutions. The response indicating that assistance also reaches “people who know how to manipulate the system” was rated highest on a five-point scale. This may suggest that the employees see that assistance does not only go to the persons eligible. It also seems to reflect a sense that social assistance is not properly targeted.

Let us note that many beneficiaries indicate that cash benefits are the most desirable form of support. It is obvious that for many people in financial difficulties, this kind of support is essential to meet their basic needs. For many, receiving extra funding can be the difference between living in extreme poverty and a minimum level of dignity. However, they seem to focus on being provided with short-term financial support and less on acquiring the skills and tools necessary to manage independently in the future. This approach of beneficiaries also seems to be noticed by the employees of social assistance centres, many of whom indicated that the help goes primarily to “resourceful people”. It is also worth mentioning that the majority of employees of social assistance centres agreed with the statement that social assistance is the most effective in crisis situations. This raises the question of the duration of the crisis situation because as we indicated earlier, two-thirds of the beneficiaries have been receiving social assistance for more than two years.

The clash of the needs and opinions of social assistance beneficiaries with the opinions of employees of social assistance centres suggests that social assistance systems focus on reducing social inequalities, trying to ensure equal opportunities for all members of society, but primarily in the economic dimension, less in terms of improving competencies and improving their self-sufficiency. It should be emphasised that this concerns both rural areas located near the capital (where higher costs of living, a more

Table 7. Selected results of research among employees of social assistance centres

Opinions among employees of social assistance centres	Average rating WCR	Average rating MRR
Evaluation of the degree of effectiveness of assistance provided by the social assistance centres: <input type="checkbox"/> when moving out of poverty <input type="checkbox"/> when integrating into the labour market <input type="checkbox"/> crisis situations	 3.2 3.4 3.6	 3.2 3.1 3.5
Evaluation of the possibility of verifying the degree of the use of funds in social assistance	3.8	3.7
The most effective forms of assistance according to the surveyed employees of social assistance centres*:	cash allowances, dissemination of information on the possibility of using various forms of assistance by people in need	providing a free, hot meal, helping the elderly in running a household
The least effective forms of assistance according to the surveyed employees of social assistance centres*:	cheap transport (buses), providing access to cheap municipal and social housing	providing access to cheap municipal and social housing, free Internet
Indication of who else, apart from the authorised persons, receives the assistance: <input type="checkbox"/> only authorised persons <input type="checkbox"/> people who know how to set oneself up/ meddle ("dodgers") <input type="checkbox"/> entitled persons, but not in a difficult situation <input type="checkbox"/> people who can circumvent the rules <input type="checkbox"/> resourceful people	 3.1 3.6 3.0 2.9 2.8	 3.4 3.2 3.0 3.1 2.7

Source: Based on MCPS data (2022)

absorptive labour market, other social norms, and expectations can be observed) as well as peripheral areas (with a relatively worse situation on the labour market, smaller resources of local services, and poorer access to them).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to identify the characteristics of social assistance beneficiaries living in suburban rural areas. The analysis focused on the results obtained

in the project entitled *Conducting a study on the causes of poverty in the Masovian Voivodeship based on the prepared methodological report and developing a Programme to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Masovian Voivodeship for 2023–2026* (project number 3/MCPS/05/2022/B/BS). Respondents were selected from a sample of rural residents in the Warsaw capital region. The counties inhabited by the participants are located in an area strongly influenced by Warsaw and connected to the city. These are areas that are part of a rich and rapidly developing region.

Therefore, the article contributes to the characterisation of people who use social assistance in suburban rural areas. This subject has not yet been addressed by researchers in the scientific literature in Poland. Prior to our research, only the marginalised areas as well as the needs and problems of people living there were the subject of interest of scholars. On the other hand, the areas characterised by high growth rates, high level of competitiveness, and a specific location, namely, in the vicinity of large centres unaffected by the peripheral status resulting from established history (location at the edges of current or previous administrative borders of provinces), worse demographic, and economic situations have not been researched previously.

Our analysis showed that the social assistance beneficiaries surveyed in the rural areas of the Warsaw capital region included mostly women, those of working age, who were independent householders, childless, and a significant proportion of whom had a disability certification. These characteristics are identified in the literature as contributing to social exclusion and poverty risk. The participants value the monetary and material assistance provided by local social assistance centres, and their activities are positively evaluated by those surveyed.

The image of social assistance beneficiaries functioning in the circle of rural areas around Warsaw presents people in particularly difficult social and professional situations, who have been using social assistance in their daily lives for a long time. This unoptimistic attempt to describe the characteristics of people requiring support, stereotypically associated with people from peripheral and marginalised areas, is intriguing. Suburban areas are characterised in the literature as those with a high level of socio-economic development, while the characteristics of social assistance beneficiaries in the WCR area, even in this small research sample, indicates that they are people who have been struggling with poverty, unemployment, low income, and poor quality of life for a long time. Perhaps the high level of social and economic development, and the accumulation of people with significant social and human capital, does not translate into the formulation of a systematic plan to overcome problems leading to social degradation and stimulate human growth in particularly difficult situations. This may also indicate low institutional efficiency and poor governance quality (see: Marks-Bielska et al., 2017; Spasowska-Czarny, 2017).

The peculiarities of suburban areas can have a significant impact on the appearance of the poor. Specific land use and housing policies implemented by peri-urban localities can influence the presence of low-income people. Some suburban areas may have restrictive zoning regulations that limit the construction of affordable housing or multi-family units, making it difficult for low-income people to find affordable housing options (Kneebone & Braube, 2013). Conversely, suburban localities with inclusive zoning policies and a range of housing options are more likely to have a diverse socio-

-economic mix. In addition, suburbs that have a diverse and robust local economy, with a range of employment options in different sectors, are likely to attract people of different income levels. Otherwise worse if the level of diversity is lower. Let us also pay attention to transport infrastructure, as again, in peri-urban locations, this can also affect the presence of the poor. If public transport options are limited or inadequate, this can create barriers for low-income people who rely on public transport to access employment, education, and basic services. This can result in a concentration of poverty in areas with better transport links or near urban centres. The social dynamics and characteristics of suburban communities undergoing gentrification may influence the presence of poor people. Some suburban communities may have a strong sense of exclusivity or a culture that is less welcoming to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Allard & Roth, 2016). Suburbs that prioritise equitable distribution of resources and invest in programmes to reduce poverty may have a more inclusive environment and mitigate concentrations of poverty. It is important to note that these factors, indicative of the characteristics of suburban localities, interact with each other, and the specific context of each suburb will influence the emergence of the poor. Consequently, the presence of poor people in peri-urban areas can vary considerably, from areas of concentrated poverty to more economically diverse communities.

It is difficult to predict the future and the consequences of the suburbanisation of poverty. In peri-urban areas, where poverty becomes concentrated, there is a greater risk of poverty being inherited by subsequent generations. Factors such as limited access to resources, inadequate social and educational infrastructure as well as social inequalities can influence the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next. Lack of equal opportunities and limited access to education or stable work make it difficult to break the cycle of poverty. For relatively young urban communities experiencing new forms of poverty, the causes and transmission mechanisms may differ. In such localities, modernised forms of poverty may be linked to factors such as economic restructuring, job losses, employment instability, or income inequality (Hunter, 2014). New generations may face difficulties in accessing decent work, housing, education, and healthcare. In relatively young urban communities, where there are greater socio-cultural dynamics, factors such as migration, assimilation or access to new educational and occupational opportunities may influence the transmission of poverty. It is, therefore, important to put appropriate interventions and support programmes in place that can break the cycle of poverty and provide development opportunities for the next generation. This includes investments in education, vocational skills, and ensuring equal access to them.

In our view, for a better diagnosis of the suburbanisation of poverty, several key areas should be considered. It is necessary to conduct an ongoing analysis of the statistical background data relating to poverty. It is also possible to conduct spatial analyses to understand the distribution of poverty in peri-urban areas. It can help to identify spatial patterns and potential factors influencing the suburbanisation of poverty. We also see many advantages, mainly related to the issue of generational transmission of poverty already mentioned, in conducting longitudinal studies to examine the dynamics of poverty over time, particularly, focusing on the intergenerational transmission of poverty in peri-urban areas. These studies can follow families or individuals across generations

and analyse how poverty status changes over time, taking into account factors such as educational attainment, employment trajectories, and access to social mobility opportunities. In future analyses, we would like to conduct qualitative research that can shed light on the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of peri-urban poverty. To this end, we would like to review existing policies and interventions aimed at countering the suburbanisation of poverty. Assessing the effectiveness, strengths, and limitations of these policies in reducing poverty, promoting economic opportunities, and supporting inclusive communities. This assessment can provide evidence-based policy recommendations for addressing this issue more effectively in specific areas.

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***A critical look at migration and security within
the framework of the Aberystwyth School:
the case of Poland***

Abstract

The problem of migration, which affects the international conjuncture and has been mentioned frequently in the literature over the recent years. Migration has become a major security problem not only for the receiving country but also for the sending countries. While the states acted with the classical sense of security with the 1648 Westphalia system, there were especially critical approaches that wanted to change this perception. Aberystwyth School, one of the critical theories, also argues that this perception should be changed. According to this school, instead of a rigid border and military security, the changing and deepening security problems should also be ad-

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dressed. The immigration problem, which became more prominent in the international conjuncture, especially after the Syrian civil war, proves critical security theories. In this article, we tried to explain security problems posed by the immigrant problem in Europe on the Polish example following the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Thus, by referring to the Aberystwyth School principles on Ukrainian immigrants, a diversified security perspective was provided.

Keywords: Poland, security, immigration, Ukraine crisis, Aberystwyth school

Introduction

The current migration crisis remains one of the most important pending issues of the international community, especially the irregular migration phenomenon, and results in spreading conjectures and speculations. Human migration has influenced history since the beginning of civilisation (Ticu, 2021, p. 338). Migration also, directly and indirectly, affected the security of states and people in this historical scene. The concept of security was widely used in the international migration literature with the increase in international mass migrations and human mobility which has turned into a security problem (Simsek & Icduydu, 2017, p. 9). The concept of security has evolved historically due to many variables. It is controversial in many ways because of the dominant relationship of the concept of security with military threats and the perception of state-centred security (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, p. 2). Some theorists have concluded that security is “essentially a controversial concept” (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, p. 3). While there is no clear consensus on how to define security, it becomes even more complicated when combined with immigration. Many factors contribute to the problem of international migration, including political impotence, wars, terrorist incidents, violations of human rights, disasters, an increase in the unemployment rate, economic inadequacies, and access to better living conditions (Sen & Şimşek Keskin, 2019, p. 186). In international migration studies, the concept of “security” generally encompassed the protection of state sovereignty and national security (Simsek & Icduydu, 2017, p. 8).

According to Walt, the essence of international security is power competition between states, understood in terms of coercive ability (military power). In this view, security is considered narrowly in terms of state survival. The state is taken as the primary “reference object” to be secured and it focuses heavily on military power, which is fundamental (Walt, 1991, p. 212). Modern security theorists, such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer also defended the traditional security concept. However, this perception has changed over time, especially within the framework of the developments after the Cold War. Thus, over time, the traditional perception of security has diversified and met with many different concepts. Although traditional security was dominant for most of the 20th century, critical security studies also emerged in this period (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2021, p. 5).

According to David Baldwin, the understanding of security produced by the Cold War started to change and is superior to all other dimensions of military security

(Baldwin, 1997, p. 9). He argues, however, that security becomes an issue when military strength is problematic. Otherwise, it is accepted as a domestic policy issue. However, once the Cold War was over, security was no longer primarily a military issue as it used to be. He argues that many different concepts were involved in security in the post-Cold War period, including environmental security, identity security, and social security (Ticu, 2021, p. 397).

The relationship between the concept of “security” and the phenomenon of “migration” was heavily debated toward the end of the 1980s. At the same time, there was an academic discussion about how to study modernisation and security problems in society. This debate was oriented toward three main axes.

Firstly, the discussion revolved around national security issues and broadening of security studies. Thus, the perception of researchers and theorists was expanded. Security studies evaluated the threats and dangers of migration studies within the scope of national security. The real question was whether security studies should be limited to military threats and the battlefield alone, or whether their scope should be broadened to include non-military, environmental, economic, identity, and migration issues (Ticu, 2021, p. 388).

The second discussion was the deepening of reference issues (about what needs to be secured). This means that “security studies should mainly use state-centred themes that focus on the security of states and their citizens” (Ticu, 2021, p. 389). The discussion includes a wide range of topics, such as the safety of individuals, communities, or humanity as a whole (Ticu, 2021, p. 389).

Lastly, epistemological and ontological axes were drawn about how security should be perceived and what its nature was (Ticu, 2021, p. 390). Thus, critical security gained importance. The concept of national security as a social construct emerged as a different perspective at Aberystwyth School.

Critical security approaches have had a significant impact on security studies since the 1990s. One of the most important topics in literature is the relationship between migration and security. The purpose of this study is to discuss the Aberystwyth School’s contributions to understanding the migration-security relationship, which is one of its approaches in critical security studies. These contributions provide a useful framework for understanding the immigration/immigrant problem faced by Poland and the countries of the region. In the study, we also examined why the Aberystwyth School should be preferred, unlike the theoretical and empirical contributions of the Copenhagen and Paris Schools, which are more discussed in the literature in the context of migration-security connection compared to the Aberystwyth School. The relationship of migration with security will be included in the analysis within the framework of the security relationship of Ukrainian immigrants to Poland according to the Aberystwyth School. The aim of the study is to discuss how the framework proposed by the Aberystwyth School in the context of the migration-security relationship, can contribute to understanding this relationship.

The objective of the study is to examine the connection between migration and security within the scope of critical security studies and to reveal the rapidly increasing number of international immigrants in the world in recent years as a result of developments such as civil wars, economic crises, and natural disasters. (Kucuk, 2021, p. 6).

It should also be noted that a fully detailed analysis of the relationship between migration and security is difficult to find in traditional studies that refer to these issues (Ticu, 2021, p. 390). Migration has become an important matter in all these critical security discussions. Again, human mobility caused by the Syrian Civil War and the war in Ukraine is important in maintaining this connection. For all these reasons, a literature review will be conducted and the migration and immigrant problem will be analysed within the scope of critical security studies. In the method of the study, a literature review was conducted. Moreover, current surveys (Made Survey in Turkey and European states) and developments were taken into account.

Since critical security studies include very extensive literature, this article will focus only on the Aberystwyth School. This article consists of five parts. In the first part, the refugee crisis in Poland following the Ukraine-Russia war is discussed. In the second part, the contribution of Aberystwyth School to critical security is discussed with real examples on the security context in Poland. In the third section, the social problems faced by immigrants are discussed. In the fourth chapter, the immigrant crisis in Poland is critically discussed within the framework of Aberystwyth School and human security. In the fifth and last chapter, the contribution of the Aberystwyth School to critical security along with the developments after the Russia-Ukraine war is discussed with its results.

Refugee crisis in Poland after Ukraine-Russia tension

The foundations of the Aberystwyth School were laid by the writings of Ken Booth and Richard Wyn Jones, two important academics working in the field of security at Aberystwyth University (Bilgin, 2008, pp. 89–102). The Aberystwyth School developed a theory in which Booth and Jones stood out, challenging the definition of security as a purely military force (Lykoyannis, 2015, p. 9). Critical Theory brought an important break from the traditional understanding of security by connecting the concept of security to emancipation (Kolasi, 2013, p. 123).

Marxism is at the heart of the Aberystwyth School. The forefathers of this approach, Booth and Jones, were heavily influenced by Gramsci's critical theory and the Frankfurt School. This school sees security as a "derivative concept". Robert W. Cox and Timothy Sinclair recognised the "institutions", social and power relations of their approach, but questioned them; they were interested in their origins and form (Eraliev, 2018, p. 23). The Copenhagen, Aberystwyth and Paris Schools have a great role in the development of new approaches to security and the transformation of the definition of security (Mandaci et al., 2013, p. 107).

Unlike the Copenhagen and Paris schools, this school has a specific definition of security. The Aberystwyth School enlarged the framework of this notion of security at this point by rejecting the traditional understanding of security, which sees the state as the natural protector of its citizens in the context of the migration-security relationship (Eraliev, 2018, p. 24). According to Booth, "security" means the absence of threat (Booth, 1991, p. 319). Emancipation is the freedom from physical and human constraints that prevent people from doing what they want. War and the threat of military

conflict; poverty, poor education, political oppression, etc. is one of these restrictions. Liberation and security are two sides of the same coin. Liberation provides real security, not power or order. By advancing emancipation, this school maintains a “critical” expansion of reflection and adds new concepts to the definition of security to include other non-state security issues such as poverty, environment, and identity (Eraliev, 2018, p. 23).

The association of security with the concept of emancipation by the Aberystwyth School represents the transition from the classical to the new security understanding. (Sandıklı & Emeklier, 2012, p. 58). Liberation, in theory, is “security” (Booth, 1991, p. 319). “Emancipation” is accepted by this school as the aim of critical security studies. For Booth, emancipation means securing people against the pressures that prevent people from doing what they would normally choose to do, while not restricting the freedoms of others.

Booth broadened and deepened the definition of security both locally and globally by making a new security coding with the axis of freedom (Sandıklı & Emeklier, 2012, p. 56). According to the school, security can lead to emancipation by bringing to light “human rights violations, oppression of minorities, the powerlessness of the poor, violence against women” (Kucuk, 2021, p. 14). Thus, Aberystwyth School, in a sense, turned towards social transformation by discovering and enlightening the emancipation of people with the critical dimension of security (Eraliev, 2018, p. 23).

The Aberystwyth School criticises the securitisation theory as its level of analysis focuses on the security of the state and society as well as of the individual. They reinterpreted security as a concept that “frees life from the constraints that determine life and enables the exploration of different life possibilities” (Booth, 2005, p. 58). For example, all kinds of threats such as war, hunger, poverty, famine, natural disasters, and environmental pollution restrain people (Booth, 2005, p. 58). Beyond military threats, many issues such as economic, political, and social problems, environmental pollution, destruction of natural resources, socioeconomic inequality, ethnic conflicts, epidemics, gender, and international smuggling are included in the security agenda (Simsek & Icduydu, 2017, p. 71). With the broadening of the meaning of security, other sectors outside the military field began to be addressed, as well as who can provide security and to whom. It has been possible to give answers to questions beyond the state. According to the Aberystwyth School, ontologically the reference object of security is individuals. According to Booth, it is problematic and confusing to take the state as a central reference object in security studies (Booth, 1991, p. 320). In this sense, while different actors such as states, NGOs, and individuals can provide security, the main actors who need to be protected are individuals (Kucuk, 2021, p. 15). Reducing security to the individual in critical security studies does not mean that state security is pushed to the background. Thus, the Aberystwyth School advocates for broadening the scope and definition of security.

According to the Aberystwyth School, although security was traditionally related to the state and its concerns, it will not always remain so. First of all, individuals are considered the reference objects of security and attention is drawn to the fact that different actors are active in the field of security. This school also opens up new areas for us to think about how we can go beyond the insecurities experienced in the field

of migration by “politicizing security” (Booth, 2007, p. 112). It especially contributes to understanding the security problems caused by Ukrainian refugees in the region and the surrounding countries. The fact that Ukrainians and Syrians who were forcibly displaced as a result of wars constitute the largest refugee group in the world is a phenomenon that needs to be examined.

Aberystwyth School theorists contradict the conceptualisation of security, choosing to define the meaning of the term “security” instead as a scientifically tested objective concept “against the real world” (Ticu, 2021, p. 391). This school should be preferred, as it deals with ordinary things in everyday life, people and the state-based security system. In parallel, Booth tried to challenge conceptualisations about the realism of the world by arguing that “critical approaches to international relations and international strategic studies” (Ticu, 2021, p. 392), not by rejecting the idea of realism, but by gaining access to a more sophisticated level. Thus, he tried to be realistic. For him, security means liberation. Security and community are two important values in contemporary society, which have emerged as guiding principles that contribute to the growth of a human rights system that characterises a global culture and can support what might be termed “emancipation politics” (Ticu, 2021, p. 392). For the Aberystwyth School, emancipation is a continuous process rather than an endpoint (Kolasi, 2013, p. 146). The School contributed to broadening its understanding of security in order to address the variety of insecurities that it faces (Bilgin, 2010, p. 84).

For the Aberystwyth School, the security of one comes at the expense of the other, and the concept of security has always held conservative connotations. Therefore, the School does not support the unlimited or unconscious expansion of the safety agenda (Eraliev, 2018). It reveals the politics of “whose security” in the immigration-security debate, pointing to “the security of immigrants and citizens in host communities”. At this stage security for both Ukrainian immigrants and host Poles will be analysed according to the Aberystwyth School’s theory.

Aberystwyth School and the example of Poland

The issue of migration, which is accepted as one of the main issues in today’s international relations, cannot be understood separately from the current global order, economic inequalities, wars or ecological problems caused by globalisation. In the 21st-century global system, the concepts of security and threat are also transformed (Mis, 2011, p. 26). While the causes of migration point to global dynamics, the solution to the problems of individuals experiencing migration-related insecurity is the responsibility of all people, especially those who have access to resources. So, according to the Aberystwyth School, people who have been in tough circumstances due to the dynamics in world politics need to be “liberated”. To achieve this, it is important to accept these individuals as the main reference object of security; because these individuals are shown as “threats” when establishing this connection (Kucuk, 2021, p. 16). It is undeniable that this representation has spawned many exclusionary and discriminatory discourses and practices against immigrants and refugees. One of the reasons for the death of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, who was trying to reach Europe by escaping

the war in Syria with his family, on the seashore is “the desire of European states to use stricter border and asylum regimes to limit the flow of migrants and refugees” (Kucuk, 2021, p. 17). At this point, in the context of humanitarian security, the transition of Ukrainian individuals fleeing the war to the European Union via Poland and the problems faced by refugees in the meantime are in the scope of this new understanding of security. In addition to all these, the fact that many countries in the EU see Poland as a buffer also creates different security problems.

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, prompting the United Nations High Commissioner for Asylum (UNHRC) to proclaim a Level 3 state of emergency (the highest level) (Cénat et al., 2022, p. 1). Poland forms the longest part of the EU’s external border and it is of great geopolitical importance (Perkowska, 2020) as it borders with three non-EU states and acts as a kind of EU border security. Poland is involved in very important geopolitics, especially in the Ukraine issue. It is possible to describe Poland as the European Union’s gateway to the East. The vast majority of immigrants fleeing the Ukraine-Russia war entered the European Union via Poland. The length of the Polish border with states outside the European Union is 1,580.77 km, while the length of the border with Ukraine is 535.18 km (Perkowska, 2020, p. 3). With this crisis, its importance for the EU has emerged once again.

Russia’s war on Ukraine in February 2022 led to the greatest refugee exodus in Europe since WWII, with UNHCR estimating 6.3 million refugees (2022). Approximately, 3.5 million war refugees crossed the Polish border in the first two months, with more than 95% of them being Ukrainian residents (Duszczek & Kaczmarczyk, 2022, p. 166). While the population of Ukraine was around 44 million before the Russian war, it is now estimated that 17.7 million people need protection and humanitarian assistance. It is also assessed that 6.6 million people were displaced within the country in this attack (OCHA, 2022).

According to the information given by the Polish authorities, as of May 15, 2022, the number of registered persons with a PESEL² number rose to 1.1 million with a very special demographic structure (Duszczek & Kaczmarczyk, 2022, p. 167). The biggest task in this humanitarian crisis is left to the Polish people and the state. The main reasons influencing irregular migration through Poland include EU membership, Schengen state status, and the recent economic growth of the country (Perkowska, 2020, p. 3). The immigrants passing through the Polish border created a very intense wave of migration in the first days of the war. Their main motivation was to escape the direct threat to their lives, and as their destinations, they selected the EU Member States with better life conditions. If we look at the history of Ukraine, it is known that there were four waves of intense migrations: (i) The first wave with ca. 1.5 million immigrants between 1880–1914; (ii) The second wave, between 200 and 300 thousand in the years 1914–1939; (iii) The third wave, between the end of 1939– and 1950s with over 300 thousand people; (iv) The fourth wave between 2012 and 2016 with 14.5 thousand people. This fourth wave is estimated to have resulted from worsening socioeconomic conditions as well as political problems at the end of 2013 (Bilan, 2017, p. 74). Ukrain-

² The Pesel number is the code required for residence in Poland. It can be thought of as a nationality number.

ian immigrants moved to many European states, especially border countries. According to the Ukrainian state statistics, 56.2% of the labour migrants were in Poland in 2008 and the effect of this rate on the labour market was negative (Bilan, 2017, p. 70).

In addition, although the influx of immigrants in 2008 was smaller compared to other immigration waves, it is known that the largest part of undocumented immigrants came to Poland. Similar information from the Polish state supports these findings. According to Polish officials, between the beginning of 2014 and February 18, 2015, 2,318 Ukrainian residents applied to the Polish government for asylum and sought refugee status (Bilan, 2017, p. 81). Since 2015, the number of Ukrainian refugees in Poland has been over 20 thousand, which is huge for the growing and developing Polish state (Bilan, 2017, p. 82). In 2015, the number of asylum-seekers from Ukraine who entered the EU surpassed 22,000 people. This figure is 33% higher than in 2013. The countries with the highest number of asylum-seekers in this fourth wave are Italy, Germany, Spain, and Poland (Bilan, 2017, p. 81).

The Polish state was greatly concerned about the influx of immigrants on its borders. This concern is reflected in the statements made by the official authorities and the policies they put into practice. As of November 2021, when the migrant crisis started to emerge as a serious problem, concerns increased rapidly in Poland. Indeed, words made by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki against Russian President Vladimir Putin can be interpreted as proof of this (Hatap & Yeltin, 2022, p. 109).

While there are security problems for the receiving states and local people, there are some for immigrants as well. These include unemployment and economic-based marginalisation in the regions they go to, associating immigrants generally with crime, malnutrition and lack of access to healthcare among others. In terms of the receiving state, some problems such as the perception of insecurity and an increase in economic burden emerged. New security problems emerged in real life as it is claimed by Aberystwyth School. Again, the idea of providing security for both the state and the individual gave good ground for the theory with the developments.

For the purpose of this study, we will call another and the largest number of immigrants the fifth wave, which took place in 2022. It is estimated to be 6.6 million people. This figure is the largest of the mass migrations in Europe in the post-WWII period (OCHA, 2022). Since the beginning of the Russian occupation, 5.3 million Ukrainians have entered the EU (FRONTEX, 2022).

The immigration systems of European countries were not ready for this fifth wave. They have not yet recovered from the problems caused by the migration wave of immigrants who fled the Syrian civil war and wanted to enter the European Union through Turkey. What is more, the intense influx of immigrants deeply affected the immigration policies of the already existing European states. As the migration movements became widespread in the post-WWII period, the foreign population and labour force rose dramatically (Bilan, 2017, p. 109). According to a study conducted in 2022, 6.9 million individuals evacuated Ukraine, with 2.2 million registering in European countries, including 1.3 million in Poland, 971,000 in Germany, 413,000 in the Czech Republic, 160,000 in Italy, 145,000 in Turkey, and 133,000 people in Spain (UN Home Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022). In our study, we focus on Poland, which was exposed to the flow of immigrants about seven years ago and is

home to 1.3 million people in the immigration flow, which we call the fifth wave. While it has become a great burden for the developing economy even in the number of immigrants in 2015, the economic burden that fell on the Polish due to the influx of 1.3 million people will be better understood in light of the economic data that will emerge in the coming years.

According to the current figures, there are 7,678,757 Ukrainian immigrants across Europe. The number of Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection in Poland is 1,436,558 (Operational Data Portal, n.d.). This figure constitutes a very serious burden for the developing Polish state. Judging by the official data of the Polish government, from January 2021 to August 2022, there was a net decrease in the unemployment rate (Yayınlanan, 2022). However, in the coming months, it will be possible to provide forecasts about the increasing unemployment rates of Ukrainian refugees.

It is known that between February 2022 and September 2022, inflation increased continuously in Poland and this rate was 17.2 in September 2022 (Trading Economics, n.d.). Housing prices in Poland increased by 14.0% in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the previous year (Euronews, 2022). Pre-existing economic problems are as effective as the effects of Ukrainian immigrants in this increase. However, considering the housing needs of Ukrainian immigrants, this rate is expected to grow, as in the case of Syrian immigrants coming to Turkey. It is also known that in May 2022, rents in Poland increased by 13.9% in a Year on Year (YoY). It is thought that especially with the arrival of winter, the need for shelter will increase even more and this rate will move upward depending on economic factors. The Polish currency (zloty) has declined in comparison to the previous year due to rising inflation against the euro. Considering the effects of COVID-19 and the developing Polish economy, inflation may increase further along with the influx of Ukrainian immigrants.

It is clear that for the developing Polish economy, adding the immigration problem to the negative effects of the COVID-19 process will impose an extra burden on the state budget. As it can be seen from the 2022 report of the World Economic Forum, this judgment supports the idea that the economic recession in the COVID-19 process, the restrictions on tourism activities and the decrease in foreign trade will adversely affect the finances of developing countries in particular as even developed countries have entered recession in many commercial areas. During the World Economic Forum, it was also said that the COVID-19 pandemic would result in limiting job opportunities for immigrants in the future and 85 million jobs will be damaged by 2025 (World Economic Forum, 2022). Because of this forecast, many countries have taken new measures and developed some radical discourses, especially on immigration.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Aberystwyth School prefers to “reveal the politics of security” instead of “taking the problems out of security” (Oancă, 2022, p. 11) to deepen the concept of security. This means that security should not be left to a political monopoly and draws attention to the discourses of politicians.

It is observed that the vote rates of populist parties increased in EU countries between 2015 and 2020. Such parties managed to come to power (Oancă, 2022, p. 11). Xenophobia, discrimination, marginalisation, and immigration have begun to be seen as invaders. The article showed that immigrants are beginning to be viewed as invaders

(Oancă, 2022). It also draws attention to the fact that these discourses are frequently used in election rallies of political parties, especially in Europe (Bulut & Akin, 2020, p. 72). Generally, immigration and anti-immigrant discourses have increased all over Europe in recent years, and these issues seem to raise security concerns. This is a result of the anti-immigrant rhetoric in Europe finding support in the parliaments of these countries, especially in the 2000s (Mandacı & Özerim, 2013, p. 106).

Drawing attention to this perception, the World Economic Forum 2022 Report argues that the negative attitudes of states towards cross-border migration, especially the ignorance of the future effects of the post-pandemic process, the state of future employment trends, and the increasing national interest stances of many countries are effective. It also concluded that the economic consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak have encouraged some political leaders to adopt more hostile attitudes toward immigration (Global Risk Report, 2022). Many academic studies on asylum-seekers and refugees residing in Europe emphasised state policies and steps to deter refugee immigration. These political attitudes also produce a positive result in terms of votes (Simsek & Icdydu, 2017, p. 13). Despite the growing negative attitude towards immigration, states in Europe are on the rise in parliament. Across Europe, the populist (especially those on the ideological right) won a majority of votes in the last legislative election, according to an analysis of data from the Pew Research Center's ParlGov, primarily a clearinghouse for international political information (Silver, 2022).

The Ukrainian conflict has exposed numerous types of racism in which some individuals think they are inferior because of their skin colour. For starters, journalists, political analysts, politicians, and the vast majority of the general public have inferred that European Union citizens deserve more dignity and respect than others. A war waged in a European country came as a surprise to many journalists, and others said that it was not a "third-world country". Other reporters added they were not in the Middle East or Africa and said that Ukrainian migrants were civilized from the middle class and deserved to live since they had blond hair and blue eyes like any European family (Cénat et al., 2022, p. 1). By making such claims, Westerners minimise violence against individuals in other countries. This, once again, demonstrates the importance of the Aberystwyth School's perception of security in terms of revealing the politics of security (Cénat et al., 2022, p. 1).

Evaluation of the Polish refugee crisis within the framework of the Aberystwyth School and human security

In the literature, the nexus between migration and security became more prominent in 2001, particularly, in European countries. The impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on the securitisation of migration was widely discussed, and it is generally agreed that these terrorist attacks gave securitisation actors in the EU an opportunity to establish a link between migration and terrorist threats, which in turn worsened the image of irregular migrants (Turgay, 2021, p. 11). As human security thought advanced, a new sort of transnational morality arose in which distrust of other people became a universal moral imperative rather than a question of preserving re-

gional or national sovereignty (Wagnsson et al., 2010, p. 5). International migration threatens national security. State and individual security are thus threatened. It can be said that the irregular migration crisis, which is one of the most pending international problems, has the power to fundamentally affect countries, regions, and even the international system. As a matter of fact, the ongoing wars, conflicts, and instability in Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine, and many parts of the world are the most obvious indicators of this (Hatap & Yeltin, 2022, p. 101).

In the context of migration and security in literature, a trend to link migration and crime rates can be noticed. A field study in Turkey has shown that Syrian immigrants are thought to increase crime rates (Memiş, 2015, p. 106). Another survey revealed that crime rates are both higher and more unsafe (Dogan & Surum, 2020, p. 88). In a survey conducted in Europe, 51% of the respondents believe that immigrants increase crime rates (Kocak, 2016, p. 83).

According to a study conducted in North America in 2017, they did not want irregular immigrants because they separated immigration as regular and irregular and thought that irregular immigrants would cause some economic and social problems within the country (Bulut & Akın, 2013, pp. 81–82). Immigrants are excluded because of their low income, social exclusion, stigma, social and psychological criteria, and the uncertainty of their future position as depicted in the European Social Survey conducted in 2012 (Bilan, 2017, p. 71). Immigrants, who are known as invaders, foreigners and free-riders, have begun to distance themselves from society. Thus they are in disharmony with society, they are distanced from it (Bulut & Akın, 2013, p. 82).

The problem of immigration affects society and health security in many ways. Refugees and asylum-seekers, who often become forced migrants due to push factors, have problems in accessing health services, which constitute the basic needs and human rights (Sen, 2017, p. 187). Children are generally absent from the field of IR and security studies (Wagnsson et al., 2010, p. 2) and their safety was not the subject of extensive research in the literature. In terms of children's safety, the subject of their health is of key importance, also in view of an increased epidemic risk due to a lack of vaccinations among certain groups. Population movement and concentration of displaced population in crowded areas at border crossings can increase the risk of measles, flu, and other diseases transmission in the immigrant community (WHO, 2022). Given the high proportion of children in the refugee population, many of them may remain susceptible to common diseases and the risk of epidemics is considerable.

It should be noted that children under the age of 15 living in conflicted countries are almost three times more likely to die from diarrheal diseases caused by the lack of safe water and hygiene than from violence. However, unsafe food consumption poses the greatest risk for children under five years of age. The risk of foodborne and waterborne illness in camp-like settings is higher than in refugee populations integrated into host communities (WHO, 2022).

The security problem should not only be seen as a problem of the receiving country, but also of the sending country. In 2018, a study revealed that male and female trafficking in a conflict-ridden country (UNODC, 2018a). In addition to these, they faced many problems such as survival, education, health and lack of legal rules (UNODC, 2018b). What is more, some immigrants are abducted and forced to work

in other migration flows, which has a negative impact on individuals from both receiving and sending countries (UNODC, 2018b). Finally, the negative attitudes of citizens in immigration countries towards immigrants also threaten individual security.

Evaluation of the Polish refugee crisis within the framework of the Aberystwyth School and human security

Preventing potential clashes between Ukrainians and Poles is a major concern. A big foreign population influencing the host community's daily life has the potential to provoke conflict. Tensions are easily prevented in the short term due to the uniqueness of the scenario, but they will undoubtedly occur in the medium and long term. Those who rely on public services, in particular, may see their living standards fall as a result of the presence of a large number of war refugees who will also be entitled to state assistance. A similar situation might emerge in the job market, with potentially disastrous consequences, particularly, at the local level. These dangers must be identified, monitored, and managed by well-planned public policies, including public awareness campaigns (Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022, p. 170). As stated in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, human security is defined as "security against chronic threats such as hunger, disease and oppression", and "protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in daily life patterns", but such problems are still encountered today. (Akyesilmen, 2012, p. 81).

Another critical issue to solve is energy security. Following the Ukraine-Russia conflict, European governments' attitudes and political discourses created a new security concern that impacted both states and individuals. It emphasises the fact that the security dimension of emerging concerns on the political agenda is sometimes an unintended consequence of conventional security challenges. As a result, a rogue state might risk a power outage, or a civil war could result in refugee flows that undermine European security as well as the assurance of energy supply and control (Ticu, 2021, p. 398). British Prime Minister, Liz Truss, in her statement on the Ukraine-Russia war, mentioned that a new security problem arose for many European states as a result of Russia's curtailment of energy supply (Russell, 2022), which view is also an expression of perspective of the Aberystwyth School.

Genuine security necessitates not just the absence of protection from a military threat, but also the management of many threats to governments and people's economic and social-political well-being (Ticu, 2021, p. 397). In the 21st century, an increase in idealistic tendencies regarding human rights, law, international cooperation, free trade, democratic governments, and social developments aimed at ensuring security and eliminating war. It introduced us to different dimensions of security. This might be interpreted as a shift from state security to individual security. Although security has always been associated with the state and its concerns, this will not always be the case. Aberystwyth School is living testimony of this (Mis, 2012, p. 39). In the 7th European Migration Form Report, the idea of human security was examined from the perspective of economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Under these headings, human security is defined

in a broad framework that includes protection from epidemics that threaten the lives of individuals, inequality of economic opportunity, forced displacement, environmental factors, inability to preserve their culture as a society, and protection from all kinds of political pressure, including state oppression (European Economic and Social Committee, n.d.). It can be said that the existence of these concepts is a result of the changing and deepening perception of security. It demonstrates the significance of critical security within the context of the Aberystwyth School and the new security concerns mentioned above. As a result, attention is directed to the presence of new security challenges in addition to the traditional security view. Thus, in addition to the critical security studies in the literature, new security problems arising from the principles of the Aberystwyth School are mentioned.

Legal processes are applied to facilitate the adaptation of immigrants to the country they go to. Studies were carried out for the integration of immigrants into society. Applications to combat immigrant unemployment. Some of the studies we encounter in EU countries are the practices that are an economic burden such as creating camps and living spaces before the immigrants arrive at the borders of the country (Kocak, 2016, pp. 75–88). These practices show that the security relationship between the immigrant and the state (individual and state) has deepened and diversified. Thus, we met with new security concepts beyond the classical security perception. The emerging new perception of security constitutes a solid defence for the Aberystwyth School.

Conclusion

The Aberystwyth School aimed to reconstruct security rather than refer to its narrow and exclusionary character. In this sense, the concept of security has been expanded to include a critical attitude toward traditional military security. This school aimed to liberate security. It defined emancipation as removing the physical and human limitations that prevent individuals and groups from doing what they want to do. The elements of insecurity experienced by real people and groups formed the starting point of Aberystwyth School. Individuals are its main object of reference, thus ensuring global security through the emancipation of individuals and groups.

After the Ukraine Crisis, millions of people had to leave the countries due to their security concerns. This new situation has brought many security problems such as political, social, economic, etc., in terms of human security as well as emigration and immigration countries. Classical security approaches, which take the state as a reference object with a more realistic perspective are insufficient to explain such new security problems in the international arena. At this point, Aberystwyth School, which is based on both human and state security, offers a conceptual and theoretical framework to explain the refugee crisis, which is the migration phenomenon in which humanitarian crises are most painfully experienced in the era of globalisation. In this study, the problems experienced by Polish and Ukrainian individuals were analysed within the framework of Aberystwyth School's security perception.

In light of the fact that the latest influx of refugees is bigger than any other migration flow so far (it is likely to exceed two million people), it should be noted it may

cause some difficulties. The Polish people and state are in danger of facing humanitarian crises due to: (i) an increase in rental prices and housing; (ii) the obligation of the Polish government to allocate more budgets for the supply of medical care and medicine compared to previous years; (iii) rising cost of living and problems in meeting basic needs; (iv) energy consumption increase in the winter months and the energy problem as well as (v) discrimination, etc.

In the context of human security, such problems threaten individual and state security. Moreover, the fact that immigrants are unemployed and have low or no income in Poland, which will be an economic burden to the state and will increase public spending. Immigrants are considered cheap labour which negatively affects the economic security of both individuals and states.

The new understanding of “security”, which argues that security is not only about the detection and elimination of military threats, upon which the purpose of security policy is not only to prevent wars but to ensure the happiness and well-being of people, is now on the agenda and has begun to be accepted.

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***Impact of COVID-19 on social policy:
a literature review in the social
and human sciences***

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Abstract

COVID-19 has paralysed many countries' social and economic lives. COVID-19 has pushed the world towards drastic social distancing and sterilisation measures to limit the spread and impact of the infection. However, it remains unclear what the long-term physical, psychological, socio-economic, and political decisions will be and their consequences. Scientists today have a great responsibility to study this period. Therefore, expert data contributes to the individual and collective development of citizens. The analytical method used in this study involved a theoretical analysis of publications on social and human sciences from the Scopus database, mainly focusing on the year 2020, to develop a framework for understanding the societal repercussions of the pandemic. The study defines a wide range of social consequences and effects of COVID-19, shows the impact pandemic on education in the context of social policy, establishes the socio-political and economic consequences of COVID-19, and substantiates psychological reactions to COVID-19. A review of the literature can help determine the impact of COVID-19 on social policy. Based on the analysis of the papers, it can be concluded that COVID-19 has increased inequality, widened the gap between the rich and the poor, and threatened the stability of society in low-income countries.

Keywords: social consequences, COVID-19, pandemic, social and human sciences, social effects

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the consequences of COVID-19 on social policy and to emphasise the significance of moving beyond the existing state of the knowledge in this subject. By examining existing literature in the social and human sciences and identifying research gaps, we can uncover new insights and propose innovative solutions to address the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The society's citizens experienced widespread panic at the start of the quarantine. There are four causes for the occurrence of mass panic: individual and psychological, physiological, socio-situational as well as political-ideological conditions (Osadchenko et al., 2020). According to Loginov's (2020) research, the majority of people recognised the COVID-19 outbreak as a hazard and changed their behaviour to reduce any risks. The preconditions for distrust during the crisis (quarantine) were the communication gap (contradictions in the information space, misunderstanding of the decisions made by the authorities); social contract crisis (a sense of social injustice; accumulated experience of unjustified expectations); as well as polarisation in social networks, and the contradiction of eyewitness experiences to the official agenda (Makusheva & Nesitik, 2020, p. 444).

In our opinion, it is very important to know the experience of combating the Ebola and Zika viruses (Southwell et al., 2020). The experience of dealing with viruses demonstrates the critical importance of addressing problems within communities directly and involving people. The similarities between COVID-19 and outbreaks of Ebo-

la and Zika viruses highlight the best practices for responding to fast-growing epidemics, closely related to the experience of fighting.

Higher education institutions are facing unprecedented difficulties as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kruse et al., 2020). The closure of sports centres and suspension of training and competitions caused by COVID-19 led to a significant decrease in physical activity (Luna et al., 2020). The spread of coronavirus has put an end to the professional and amateur football championships (Carin & Andreff, 2020). Agriculture has also suffered due to the lockdown caused by COVID-19 (Bhooshan & Kumar, 2020). For violation of the quarantine regime, criminal liability was provided (Lemeshko et al., 2020). In many countries, for violation of sanitary and epidemiological rules, punishment has been provided from a fine to a restriction of freedom.

The problems of high levels of transmission of the virus, reduction of related illnesses and deaths, and mitigation of the economic impact of a pandemic cannot be solved only by a single strategy. Evidence-based strategies are needed at the individual and community level (Honein et al., 2020). Evidence-based strategies will help overcome the obstacles caused by the pandemic and effectively build the future lives of members of society.

In a literature review, Harapan et al. (2020) examine the causative agent, pathogenesis and immune responses, epidemiology, diagnosis, treatment and management of the disease, control, and prevention strategies. Mediawati, Susanto, and Nurahmah (2020) are investigating how viruses spread based on the results of research that has been conducted. The epidemiology, clinical characteristics, diagnosis, and therapy of COVID-19 are identified through a systematic evaluation of the available information (Ghomi et al., 2020). Information on the effects of the new coronavirus infection COVID-19 on women's health is available in the review of the literature by Adamyan, Aznaurova, and Filippov (2020). In a study by Liguoro et al. (2020), the scholars conducted a systematic review of the main clinical characteristics and outcomes of infections in paediatric age groups. In a systematic review of the literature, Rajendran et al. (2020) identified threats to the human era.

In fact, COVID-19 is not only a medical research object but also a social research object (Apostolidis et al., 2020). Ruiz-Real, Nieves-Soriano, and Uribe-Toril (2020) analysed the main keywords of COVID-19 scientific research by subject area. As seen in the study, social sciences (6.07%) and arts and humanities (1.08%) played an important role in research on COVID-19.

A study undertaken by the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences can be considered thought leadership in the context of pandemics (Halamska, 2020). Many of the primary research papers carried out by Polish scientists during the pandemic are particularly important. For example, in a study in which Polish university students participated, the correlation between physical activity and fear of COVID-19 was determined (Kuśnierz et al., 2021). Kołota and Głąbska (2021) argue that e-learning supports an increase in diet and time intensification among Polish youth. Sus and Świątalska's (2021) paper investigates how the Polish Public Prosecutor's Office responded to the COVID-19 crisis, taking strategic and operational actions to halt both the virus's spread and criminal activity in Poland, while also exploring the relationship between opportunity and crisis in this emer-

gency situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted urban tourism and drastically curtailed tourist arrivals both globally and in Poland, with domestic urban tourism having the ability to play a critical part in the industry's recovery, despite infections being more common in cities than in rural areas. The study discovered that tourists' behaviour and decisions were not significantly different from those prior to the pandemic (Józefowicz, 2021). In a study that investigates how social capital influences the infection rate of COVID-19 in Poland, it is revealed that "political leaning" is negatively related to the infection rate, while structural capital has a positive effect on reducing the epidemic, and relational social capital leads to higher morbidity rates (Markowska-Przybyła & Grzeškowiak, 2022). This provides significant information for public health authorities.

According to the comments above, this study tried to structure the flow of scientific publications in the social and human sciences and identified interesting patterns in it. During the literature review, we noticed a lot of research into the diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19, the impact of COVID-19 on education, opinions on the socio-political as well as economic consequences of COVID-19, and psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic (see: Table 1). These fundamental issues, in our opinion, are crucial for social policy.

Table 1. Study selection and characteristics

Problems	Main issues
Diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19	social inequality social isolation restrictions in all spheres of social life harmful effects on society's most vulnerable groups anxiety, stressful situations, and fear
Impact of COVID-19 on education	distance learning adaptation of students to distance learning virtual space mental health problems of university students changing paradigms of higher education
Socio-political, economic consequences of COVID-19	inequalities, social inequality democratic capacities common features of crises funny images on the Internet and memes communication issues
Psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic	mental health anxiety, depression symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder isolation social distancing suicides

We systematised the researched literature and divided it into the following groups by their subjects:

1. **Social issues:** social inequality, restriction in all spheres of social life, anxiety, stressful situations, and fear are considered social consequences and effects of COVID-19 (six sources), with one source drawing attention specifically to social isolation; harmful effects on the most vulnerable groups in society (three);
2. **Health and learning:** examination of mental health of university students (six studies); distance learning and adaptation of students to distance learning (four studies); virtual space (three); and changing paradigms of higher education (three);
3. **Inequality, communication, and crises:** problems of inequality (including social) (four sources); common features of crises (four); communication issues (four); democratic capacities (three); funny images on the internet and memes (two);
4. **Psychological reactions:** social distancing (seven); anxiety, depression symptoms, and post-traumatic stress (five); suicide (three); mental health from psychological perspective (two)².

Spatial differentiation is noticed in social phenomena during COVID-19. The pandemic's social consequences are primarily felt in cities, where there is a growing socio-economic stratification. Social isolation can exacerbate the city's socioeconomic inequality and contribute to the escalation of different forms of protest. There are differences in countries, between rural and urban areas, and among different population groups in terms of the pandemic's social consequences and effects. Vulnerable communities, such as the elderly, disabled individuals, orphans, low-income individuals, and homeless citizens, have been particularly affected by the pandemic. The impact on well-being, physical health, quality of life, attitudes toward prevention, and anxiety levels can vary based on levels of education and gender inequality in diverse regions. Additionally, different countries have implemented various measures to address the pandemic's social effects, including support for small and medium-sized firms, social benefits, tax breaks, and employment assistance. These measures may have varying impacts on different segments of society. By considering multiple perspectives, common challenges, and unique social dynamics during the pandemic, the research can offer a comprehensive understanding of the global impact of COVID-19 on social life.

As mentioned above, with the advent of COVID-19, active research began in various fields of science. The body of research on COVID-19 is expanding quickly. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the number of materials discovered during the study for the keyword "COVID-19" in the Scopus abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature (2020, 2021, and 2022). Due to the large data flow for the keyword "COVID-19", we did not use the synonyms "coronavirus", "coronavirus diseases", "SARS-CoV-2", or pandemic.

Scientists widely use many authoritative databases in the scientific community. The purpose of the study, the type of material searched, and the topic of study all con-

² In addition, the issue of isolation is considered in mental health, anxiety, depression symptoms, post-traumatic stress, and social distancing. It should also be highlighted that the reviewed sources on psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic discuss the problem from different angles, and they are interconnected.

tribute to the decision to use Scopus in this paper. Scopus has a number of benefits that make it a popular choice among researchers. First, it takes a multidisciplinary approach, making it particularly useful for researchers working in interdisciplinary fields. Secondly, Scopus offers robust search functionalities and advanced filtering options that allow researchers to refine their searches and access relevant literature more efficiently. Last but not least, the database provides visualisation and analytical tools that help researchers gain insights from the data.

Table 2. The number of materials found for the keyword “COVID-19” in 2020 (data from December 4, 2022)

№	Subject area	Publications	№	Subject area	Publications
1	medicine	57,819	15	multidisciplinary	2,008
2	social sciences	10,869	16	mathematics	1,879
3	biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology	7,759	17	economics, econometrics, and finance	1,833
4	immunology and microbiology	4,951	18	agricultural and biological sciences	1,620
5	computer science	4,883	19	physics and astronomy	1,420
6	engineering	3,797	20	decision sciences	1,217
7	nursing	3,714	21	chemistry	1,214
8	pharmacology, toxicology, and pharmaceuticals	3,686	22	energy	1,154
9	environmental science	3,415	23	materials science	932
10	psychology	2,612	24	chemical engineering	849
11	neuroscience	2,350	25	dentistry	741
12	business, management, and accounting	2,300	26	Earth and planetary sciences	658
13	arts and humanities	2,059	27	veterinary	402
14	health professions	2,023	28	undefined	4

Here, it is clear that COVID-19 is significant not only for medical science but also for social science (10,869 publications).

Table 3. The number of materials found for the keyword “COVID-19” in 2021 (data from December 4, 2022)

№	Subject area	Publications	№	Subject area	Publications
1	medicine	92,734	15	arts and humanities	4,638
2	social sciences	25,289	16	health professions	4,167
3	computer science	15,792	17	decision sciences	3,877
4	biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology	14,880	18	neuroscience	3,868
5	engineering	11,460	19	physics and astronomy	3,794
6	immunology and microbiology	10,896	20	agricultural and biological sciences	3,619
7	environmental science	9,721	21	chemistry	3,196
8	nursing	7,034	22	energy	3,093
9	psychology	6,605	23	chemical engineering	2,201
10	business, management, and accounting	6,503	24	materials science	2,197
11	pharmacology, toxicology, and pharmaceuticals	6,447	25	Earth and planetary sciences	2,109
12	mathematics	5,309	26	dentistry	943
13	multidisciplinary	5,266	27	veterinary	750
14	economics, econometrics, and finance	4,924	28	undefined	0

The subject areas of the publications for 2021 have not undergone any substantial modifications. Publications have increased across all disciplines. Materials in medicine are followed by social sciences (25,289 publications).

Table 4. The number of materials found for the keyword “COVID-19” in 2022 (data from December 4, 2022)

№	Subject area	Publications	№	Subject area	Publications
1	medicine	79,932	15	arts and humanities	4,225
2	social sciences	25,650	16	health professions	4,190
3	computer science	14,072	17	chemistry	3,460
4	biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology	13,345	18	agricultural and biological sciences	3,357
5	engineering	11,785	19	neuroscience	3,342
6	immunology and microbiology	10,868	20	decision sciences	3,284
7	environmental science	9,882	21	physics and astronomy	2,943
8	business, management, and accounting	8,172	22	energy	2,707
9	psychology	7,967	23	chemical engineering	2,267
10	nursing	6,867	24	materials science	1,997
11	pharmacology, toxicology, and pharmaceuticals	6,389	25	Earth and planetary sciences	1,716
12	economics, econometrics, and finance	5,837	26	veterinary	917
13	mathematics	4,856	27	dentistry	797
14	multidisciplinary	4,670	28	undefined	0

Of course, everyone understands that publications for 2022 have increased even more. Additionally, Scopus is already indexing publications for 2023 and even 2024 at this time. In 2023, engineering (679 publications) and computer science (644 publications) are leading so far. Following them are medicine (275 publications) and the social sciences (252 publications). We are certain that there will be noticeable changes by the end of 2023. Indeed, all four papers from 2024 were published in the Brazilian Journal of Biology under the subject area of agricultural and biological sciences.

We acknowledge that this paper does not exhaust all possible literature in the social and human sciences. As you can see, there are a lot of literature reviews. However, there are currently no systematic reviews on social and human sciences. The purpose of the study was to summarise materials on social and human sciences in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify the various impacts of the pandemic. This

literature review aims to provide information on the COVID-19 issue from a social policy perspective.

Based on this, we propose our hypotheses and research questions:

H1: The diverse social consequences and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have had significant impacts on various aspects of society, including mental health, social stratification, and vulnerability among different segments of the population.

H2: The impact of COVID-19 on education has been seen in distance learning and the mental health of students and faculty.

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant socio-political and economic consequences, including the exacerbation of social inequalities, challenges to democratic institutions, shifts in global economic dynamics, and the proliferation of misinformation.

H4: Psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic are negatively impacting stressful experiences, and social distancing has really changed social life.

RQ1: What are the social consequences and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, social stratification, and vulnerability among different segments of the population?

RQ2: What are the impacts of COVID-19 on education in the context of the learning process and the mental health of those involved?

RQ3: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted socio-political and economic aspects, including social inequality, democratic institutions, global economic dynamics, and the spread of misinformation, and what are the implications for future planning and policy-making?

RQ4: How have the psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly, stressful experiences and changes in social life due to social distancing, affected individuals' mental well-being and overall psychological health?

New contributions made by this paper to the study of the issue: identification of diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19; finding the impact of COVID-19 on education in the context of social policy; establishing the socio-political and economic consequences of COVID-19; and substantiating psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data and method

As a research method, we used a theoretical analysis of publications on social and human sciences found in the Scopus database, mainly for 2020. Since the first studies were carried out that year, the selection of the study and its characteristics have been based on these data. The theoretical analysis of publications serves as the framework for developing the pandemic's societal repercussions. The relevance of the research subject and the scope of the investigation are established by a theoretical analysis of publications (Alsaalem et al., 2022; Sheng et al., 2021; Zollanvari et al., 2020). There are several options for theoretical analysis, including: evaluating the study's applicability, the depth of the problem's scientific study, and the scientific publications that have addressed it; assessment and evaluation of earlier studies; as well as elucidation of the

problem's conceptual framework. In addition, the purpose of the theoretical review was to systematise the data collected by scientists, establish the relationship between the issues under consideration, and summarise the results of the literature review on COVID-19 from a social policy perspective.

The bibliographic method of studying scientific literature on the topic of research was designed to study these sources and then analyse them (Hill & Shapiro, 1978; Raisig, 1960). A systematic literature review was conducted using the keyword "COVID-19". The systematic review (Campbell et al., 2018; Chapman, 2021; Petticrew & Roberts, 2008) aims to determine the social consequences and effects of the pandemic. By analysing the scientific literature, the authors also employed a descriptive approach relevant to the nature of the study problem. The descriptive research method included checking and reviewing the scientific literature without affecting publication (Pajunen & Itkonen, 2019; Pence et al., 2009; Toogood & Timlin, 1996). This technique was applied to get a broad picture of the research topic.

In the paper, the structural-logical model is used to methodically identify the discovered facts. This methodology can take into account the main provisions of the problem. Methods of systematisation and structuring follow the logic of these main conclusions (Avramenko et al., 2020; Leshchuk, 2014). Additionally, the study benefited from the concepts and tenets of system analysis (Akan, 2015; Kock, 2007; Saeed, 2019; Siau et al., 2011). System analysis aids in understanding the laws and principles of the problem under consideration and identifying relationships; it helps establish links between social consequences and the effects of the pandemic. It also provided us with insight into the nature of COVID-19.

Diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19

Cities are where the pandemic's social consequences are primarily felt. The analysis of the pandemic's social effects compels the examination of social exclusion regimes, as Eckardt (2020) notes. Furthermore, he contends that life in a poor family, among people of age, emigrants, and vagrants demonstrates the city's growing socioeconomic stratification. The city's socioeconomic stratification will not be weakened by social isolation. The issue may not be money in this case, but rather a person's loneliness. After all, social isolation has a significant impact on behaviour and emotional state, as well as destroying a person's consciousness. Additionally, the socioeconomic inequality of the city may contribute to the escalation of different forms of protest. Therefore, it might be claimed that social isolation exacerbates the city's social stratification.

The results of the Ohlbrecht and Jellen (2021) study show the pandemic's detrimental effects on well-being, physical health, quality of life, attitudes toward prevention, and anxiety levels. The study was conducted in Germany during the quarantine period with an online survey in which 2,009 respondents participated. The negative effects on inhabitants with low levels of education and gender inequality in accordance with the social vector are highlighted by the writers. As a result, it is possible to say that restriction is one of the pandemic's social repercussions. Limiting freedom, for instance, during a pandemic means restricting people's ability to live happily. The im-

fact of the pandemic on life quality includes being insufficient or losing one or more crucial functions. The state of the body was impacted by the poor quality of living and expensive healthcare.

Additionally, the pandemic's social consequences and effects have a significant impact on the lives of vulnerable communities (Dey & Tripathi, 2021). The authors arrived at this viewpoint based on the utilisation of secondary data, which they incorporated into their paper. The elderly were also seen as a social group that required special consideration (Zapędowska-Kling, 2022). The research methodology employed in the study primarily involves policy analysis, which includes evaluating policy outputs and outcomes, as well as normative and evaluative analysis in Poland. Therefore, it can be argued that the main socially vulnerable or unprotected segments of the population include the elderly; disabled people; orphans and children left without parental care; low-income (poor); and homeless citizens. The vulnerability of senior adults and people with disabilities is a result of their declining health, loneliness, the loss of many social ties, and their generally low standard of life. Minors' social vulnerability may be attributed to a variety of factors, including parental absence, negligent child-rearing, etc. All of these issues contribute to difficulties in realising one's professional potential, low income, and even social loneliness.

Singh (2022), in addition to the natural, material, and social outcomes of the pandemic, points to the consequences for mental health. Being South African herself, she draws conclusions about the diverse social consequences and effects of the pandemic based on the experiences of Africa, Australia, Europe, and India, and provides valuable insights into the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. By analysing and comparing the experiences of these different regions, scientists can reach broader conclusions about the social implications of the pandemic across various contexts.

Thus, it can be argued that anxiety, stress, and fear all have an impact on people's mental states. Anxiety is one of the most common emotions experienced by people in critical situations. Anxiety describes a sense of unease and a sense of impending doom. Pandemic-induced anxiety might arise for a variety of reasons: anxiety about getting unwell (oneself or their loved ones); fear about declining economic health (of oneself, possibly of the nation); not enough money, lack of income; stress brought on by the unpredictability of the circumstance and the carelessness of fellow citizens; as well as online learning, etc. Food, sleep, and work have all been impacted by stress as a result of the pandemic. For citizens, social isolation, in particular, was a major test. People's ability to move was restricted significantly as a result of the lockdown, which resulted in a decrease in their level of activity. More distressing than the coronavirus itself was fear during a pandemic. The most concerning fears, in our opinion, are the fear of contracting COVID-19, job loss, job opportunities, and lack of civil liberties.

The book, edited by Schweiger (2022), evaluates the pandemic's social consequences and measures to stop it. It was written by a group of scientists forming an international and interdisciplinary team, who come from Austria, Brazil, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, India, Ireland, Malaysia, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the USA. In an economic setting, this book highlights the social consequences and effects of the pandemic on the vulnerable and helpless segments of society. The authors contend that multiple social obstacles are a strategy for containing the pandemic's effects. Ad-

ditionally, the authors claim that the significant material damage and human casualties would have long-term social consequences. Different steps were taken to slow down and contain the pandemic's social effects. In many countries, particular focus was placed on: a pause in employment or transition to remote work; providing small and medium-sized firms with support and assistance; social benefits during the pandemic; short-term tax breaks; and postponing tax filing, etc. There was nothing to be done about the severe effects of the pandemic in terms of containment and slowing measures, especially the effect COVID-19 the restrictions had on critical economic sectors.

Impact of COVID-19 on education

COVID-19 has affected education greatly, with all types of full-time education discontinued in a matter of days in many countries. The crisis forced a change in the attitude of schools and universities to acquire knowledge in classrooms and auditoriums. Everyone understood that they would have to change the learning algorithms. For learning, you need modern information technologies (for online classes); you need to create a workspace in the house and know a culture of remote access, tolerance, and respect for learners.

We all know that during the pandemic, lecturers and professors of universities were forced to switch to distance learning. When determining the readiness of university teachers to work in distance learning during a pandemic, Puchkova, Temnova, Sorokoumova, and Chardymova (2020) found that educators were not ready to work exclusively in a distance format, regardless of gender, age, work experience, and specialisation. This conclusion was reached after 172 educators from different Russian universities responded to an online survey. The authors stated that in addition to the situational prerequisites that determine the unpreparedness of teachers to switch to distance learning in conditions of self-isolation, there are a number of systemic subjective and objective factors: a permanent situation of uncertainty in the Russian education system, provoked by Russian reforms; insufficient prevalence of distance technologies in the daily professional activities of university teachers; and a personal lack of readiness of the teacher to use distance technologies (Puchkova et al., 2020, pp. 91–92). It is important to note that the readiness of educators for remote work can vary greatly depending on various factors, including their level of digital literacy, access to technology and Internet infrastructure, training and support provided by educational institutions, and personal adaptability to new teaching methods.

Sequeira and Dacey (2020) identified stark socio-economic disparities among students at a Catholic liberal arts institution in the mid-Atlantic, USA, in a virtual space. Although there is a surge in the use of virtual space against the backdrop of the pandemic, students are looking for “real” and “wished” space (Cahapay, 2020). The results of Okada and Sheehy's (2020) study at the Open University (United Kingdom) showed that 88.77% of their survey participants valued fun in online learning, whereas 16.66% noted that fun within online learning can divert attention from learning and lead to distraction or wasted time. The results of the study by Frolova, Rogach, and Ryabova (2020) conducted at the Russian State Social University show the successful

adaptation of students to distance learning. Nevertheless, the transition to a distance learning format was accompanied by the following difficulties for students: default of a personal computer at home (10.3%); lack of access to the Internet (15.1%); insufficient computer skills (8.2%); absence of feedback from the teacher (18.5%); technical problems and poor communication quality (2.8%), etc. (Frolova et al., 2020, p. 83). The transition to distance learning has indeed presented several challenges for students. The difficulties mentioned above are common hurdles that students have encountered during remote education.

Still, the COVID-19 pandemic is altering higher education teaching and learning paradigms (Alfiras et al., 2020). Educators and students must achieve teaching and learning goals in any way possible. The COVID-19 pandemic, with its disruptions to traditional education systems, has necessitated flexibility and creativity in the pursuit of these objectives. However, we must not forget about the impact of cyberchondria and information overload on individuals' perceptions and motivations (Farooq et al., 2020). Cyberchondria refers to excessive anxiety or distress caused by searching for health-related information online. In the context of education, students may encounter similar concerns when seeking information or resources related to their studies.

All educational programmes underwent adjustments. Obviously, new approaches to higher medical education will be formed. For example, some neurology departments in the USA have changed their teaching methods in the COVID-19 era and have capitalised on the lessons learned by proposing new strategies to advance neurology education (Guadix et al., 2020). Turkish scientists, Ustabulut and Keskin (2020) attempt to map educational processes that need to be transformed and adapted to the "new normal" through a relational and metaphoric approach during the pandemic. Transforming and adapting educational processes during such a time requires innovative approaches that go beyond traditional methods. Relational and metaphorical strategies emphasise the connections between educators, students, and the learning environment while employing metaphors to facilitate understanding and engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the mental health of university students in China (Jiang, 2020). According to Ye et al. (2020), coping mechanisms, social support, and resilience can all help students deal with stressful situations and prevent acute stress disorder. In a study of students experiencing severe anxiety during the COVID-19 lockdown, Faize and Husain (2020) found that most students in Islamabad (Pakistan) had no anxiety, still, 8.2% experienced severe anxiety. In the study, which enrolled 891 students, the majority reported psychological, social, and physical problems. The pandemic has also affected the individual economic conditions of students for the better. In a study by Lorreta, Marango, and Chitongo (2020), some foreign students at Central China Normal University in Wuhan noted that social distancing allowed them to save money, focus on their lives, and improve their grades.

Torres-Hostench (2020) identified the benefits of being outdoors for physical health, knowledge, social relations, mental health, and attitude to learning. According to the scientist, being outdoors allows you to distance yourself from society. It has been proven by science that a person's spending time outside accelerates the metabolic processes of the body, strengthens the vessels and nerves of the skin, improves the functioning of the heart, and increases brain activity. We must also bear in mind that

the overuse of social media is highly addictive due to its psychological, social, and neurobiological basis (Singh et al., 2020).

As the study by Kislyakov (2020) showed, most students in the cities of Moscow and Ivanovo demonstrated constructive informational behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on cognitive interest (a cognitive type of behaviour) or fear and anxiety about coronavirus infection (a phobic type of behaviour). In addition, students showed destructive forms of informational behaviour: they were overly interested in unofficial information about the pandemic; they spread rumours and fake news among their loved ones (circulating behaviour, infodemic); they demonstrated distrust of the authorities and the media; they also experienced irritation from excessive information (nihilistic behaviour).

The forced transition to distance learning showed not only the level of readiness of teachers and students but also the level of digitalisation in some countries. All participants in higher education must further develop effective distance learning models. In the context of the pandemic, changes in educational programmes should correspond to the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of an amendment with an assessment of direct and side effects. The issue of maintaining the mental health of students during the pandemic, and the search for ways to maintain resilience, also remains relevant.

Socio-political and economic consequences of COVID-19

The social planification crisis calls for the need to reflect on the current situation created by the pandemic. It is required to understand socio-cultural, economic and technological processes and to attempt to imagine scenarios for the future (Lusardi & Tomelleri, 2020). COVID-19 constructed the status of members of society in which new inequalities can emerge. The categorical difference between Antibody Positives and other antibodies transition to a status distinction (Evans et al., 2020). The distinction in status is determined by the fact that although avoiding COVID-19 is beneficial, becoming infected is detrimental. Fernandes, Silva, Dameda, and Bicalho, (2020) argue that the consequences of the coronavirus point to social inequality as a structuring factor in Brazilian society. various forms of death to the poorest, black communities and slum dwellers show this social inequality. Inequities are seen in public funding; infrastructure; access to health care, education, stable housing, healthy food and insurance (Arrazola et al., 2020). The communication inequalities in social media have created fertile ground for the dissemination of information, misinformation and disinformation (Viswanath et al., 2020). Addressing social inequality includes ensuring equitable access to healthcare, providing targeted support to vulnerable populations, strengthening social safety nets, and addressing systemic issues that perpetuate social disparities. By recognising and addressing these inequalities, societies can work towards a more resilient future in the post-pandemic era.

Haagh (2020) argues that COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of the democratic capacities of the state and humanist governance. Five important observations concerning the opportunities and difficulties of implementing democracy are provided in an editorial by Afsahi, Beausoleil, Dean, Ercan, and Gagnon (2020): COVID-19

weakened democratic institutions and presented alternative options for democratic politics; it made disparities and unfairness between democracies even worse; it showed that institutional infrastructure is necessary for long-term solidarity and emphasised the primacy and limitations of the nation-state. Future socio-technical transformations will depend on how robust civil society and economic organisations are (Wells et al., 2020). These key pillars of society play crucial roles in shaping social policies and determining the direction of societal changes.

The results of a research study by Itani, Azeem, and Mirza (2020) showed correlations between COVID-19 and the Arab Spring. The authors claim that these two crises produced comparable economic conditions. The trust deficit, inherited features of the economy, and fiscal and monetary policies were all highlighted as moderating factors in the study. Markard and Rosenbloom (2020) uncover the tale of COVID-19 and climate crises and suggest primary ways to improve the climate, as all crises have socio-cultural and economic consequences: harnessing the disruptive forces of the COVID-19 pandemic to accelerate the decline of carbon-intensive industries, technologies, and practices; and leveraging responses to drive low-carbon innovation. We all know that globalisation has led to the spurring of environmental devastation in the first place. A new glocalisation, or globalisation, will lead to reduced air travel, local production, smart growth, and reduced automobile trips (Goffman, 2020).

Internet memes and humorous visuals about various COVID-19 pandemic-related topics elicit powerful emotional reactions. The unique nature of memes created during the crisis cycle is a salient part of the COVID-19 public discourse (Pulos, 2020). Joubert and Wasserman (2020) argue that editorial cartoons provide a useful source to help understand a broader discursive context and show the socio-economic and cultural context in the country. Memes, humorous visuals, and editorial cartoons provide a unique and engaging way to grasp public opinions, concerns, and attitudes towards policies implemented during the pandemic.

Many researchers have addressed communication issues during public health crises (King & Lazard, 2020; Noar & Austin, 2020; Manganello et al., 2020). In the age of technological advancement, there are several operational tools for information gathering that simplify educating the public but also exacerbate the worry and stress condition. In addition, during the pandemic, misinformation about the COVID-19 coronavirus flooded the Internet and social media and began to spread rapidly false medical advice. By addressing misinformation effectively, we can improve public understanding of health risks, promote evidence-based practices, and foster trust in reliable sources of information during times of crisis.

To construct meaning during the pandemic, Rimal and Storey (2020) propose three mechanisms of social norm formation: through direct experience; symbolically through media; and imaginatively. In our opinion, people should always be prepared for various pandemics according to three mechanisms for the formation of social norms and direct experience helps contain the spread and strengthen the response to COVID-19. Finding out first is always the job of the media, and finding out first-hand reliable information is important to people during the pandemic. People should imaginatively understand that COVID-19 is the pandemic and its destructive power is not over yet. Therefore, these social norms are more important than ever.

Psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic

Scientific papers on the public's psychological response to the coronavirus are becoming more and more common among scientists. This is understandable given that the disease's quick global spread makes the subject relevant. While some people are simply tired of this problem, others are panicky about the virus. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that this disease should not be taken lightly and should not give in to mass psychosis. While reviewing the literature on the behavioural and psychosocial aspects of the pandemic, we noticed that it dominated research on stress or distress (Freedland et al., 2020). While these were significant topics in the literature on the behavioural and psychosocial elements of the pandemic, research also covered a wide range of other critical areas, providing vital insights into the psychological human response to this global calamity.

COVID-19 has negatively impacted the mental health of the entire society. Patients with coronavirus have gone through a stressful experience, which may endanger their mental health. In a psychological evaluation, Bonazza et al. (2020) discovered that a significant proportion of patients at a big public health agency in Milan expressed anxiety (28%), depression symptoms (17%), and post-traumatic stress (36.4%). In addition, healthcare workers from Spanish communities also reported psychological symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder, and compassion fatigue (Dosil et al., 2020). Also, Peng et al. (2020) argue that during the pandemic, a significant proportion of the Chinese population had depressive symptoms. In a study by Chao, Xue, Liu, Yang, and Hall, (2020), the use of new media is significantly associated with more negative effects, including depression, anxiety, and stress.

According to Knight's (2020) research, loneliness lowers self-esteem and causes the creation of new worries including the preoccupation with the process of dying; existential anxiety; breakdown in communication with family and friends; current family relationships; loss of the object; threat of Internet disconnection; and fear connected to body health. COVID-19-related worries and social isolation have been important mediators of the relationship between perceived vulnerability to COVID-19 and traumatic stress (Boyras et al., 2020). Remote working has positive results during social distancing, but there is also a negative aspect to it, namely, technostress (Spagnoli et al., 2020). Taylor et al. (2020) argue that society has a poor response to COVID-19 and nonadherence to social distancing. Still, it should be noted that social distancing as a measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus had been one of the greatest impacts (de Souza, 2020).

In psychology, it is also very important to study the influence of social distancing on loneliness. Faustino, Vasco, Delgado, Farinha-Fernandes, and Guerreiro (2020) claim that loneliness is associated with the regulation of psychological needs. Studies have shown that it is positively correlated with symptomatology and difficulties in regulating psychological needs. Nevertheless, loneliness negatively affects a person's mental health and may lead to depression, paranoid feelings, suicidal thoughts, and sleep disorders. Therefore, to combat loneliness during the pandemic, many have used television and social media (Borman et al., 2022).

The pandemic's impact on mental health, including increased stress, anxiety, and social isolation, raised awareness of the need for robust social policies to address

mental health challenges and prevent suicides. Mamun, Bhuiyan, and Manzar (2020) argue that fear of infection, financial crisis, loneliness, social boycott and other problems that have emerged with the pandemic have contributed to suicide. There have been cases of suicide in hospitals due to the refusal of treatment by medical personnel fearing COVID-19 infection (Mamun et al., 2020). According to Que et al. (2020), vulnerable populations that may be at increased risk of suicide are those with individuals suspected of confirmed COVID-19 infection, healthcare workers, bereaved families, the elderly, children, and adolescents. The authors put forward recommendations for preventing suicide associated with the pandemic: preserving social connections via a website or mobile app; decreasing in unemployment; eradicating false information and rumours as soon as possible; and keeping up with psychiatric symptom therapy.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been clear adherence to COVID-19 precautionary measures. As shown by the results of the study by Tong, Chen, Yu, and Wu (2020), which took place in Macau (China), people strongly adhere to wearing a face mask (96.4%), but not social distancing (42.3%). Research by Raza, Haq, and Sajjad (2020), held in Pakistan facilitated an understanding of the factors that affect people's mental health during pandemics.

We believe that the data on the increase or decrease in the rates of daily infection in healthy people in the daily statistics also affects the human psyche. Additionally, a surge of condolences in the media and on social networks had a detrimental impact on people's psychology. Therefore, for a psychological victory over the coronavirus, everyone must remain completely emotionally calm and peaceful.

Conclusions

This paper aims at defining the diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19, the impact of COVID-19 on education, the socio-political, economic consequences of COVID-19, and psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is due to the reaction of social policy to COVID-19 in different countries at the level of strategic planning and transformation (Ramia & Perrone, 2021) and a lack of equality (Pincock et al., 2022). Also, many scientists claim that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the social aspects of society (Alghamdi, 2021), and the colossal isolation affected the saturation of human activity (Jiang & Liu, 2023). The repulsive solutions to new problems should not be the old ones as old solutions will not help new problems (Cook & Ulriksen, 2021). Human care during the COVID-19 pandemic imposed a complex set of actions and consequences on social policy (Daly, 2022). Furthermore, several Polish experts underline the impact of COVID-19 on social policy (Bieszk-Stolorz & Markowicz, 2022; Chłoń-Domińczak et al., 2021; Kalinowski & Łuczak, 2021; Łaszek, 2020). Despite the relevance of these scientific works, they do not seek answers to the questions of our study. Therefore, this paper goes beyond the state of the knowledge as it aims to comprehensively examine and analyse the existing body of literature related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on social policy within the broader fields of social and human sciences. By conducting a literature review, this

research provides a holistic understanding of the diverse ways the pandemic has influenced social policies and interventions, contributing to the knowledge base and identifying gaps for future research and policy development.

The urgency of countering, containing, spreading, and strengthening measures to combat society is extremely high due to the prevalence of the virus. Due to the danger of COVID-19 to human lives, it requires a comprehensive and consistent study, in particular, by researchers in social and human sciences. In addition, in connection with social demand, research in social and human sciences is being actively pursued in different countries. The search continues for theoretical and practical justifications for the virus, as well as mechanisms, prerequisites, and factors that may impact the spread of COVID-19.

The severe consequences of social limitations have been felt by citizens. The effects of the pandemic include disruption of society's norms, instability in global political and economic ties, unemployment, and social upheavals. All nations must, therefore, take action to control the pandemic's diverse social consequences and effects. To achieve this, it is vital to highlight the value of social policy research in order to foresee the effects of future changes and enhance the state planning system, which establishes the course for society's future growth.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has been mostly seen as a health issue, it also has serious societal consequences and effects. Our COVID-19-related literature review highlighted the social consequences and effects of the pandemic on the basis of the thorough analysis completed, outlined the significance of a qualitative improvement in social relations in the context, and, based on the outcomes, formulated the main directions for the advancement of social policy. From the standpoint of social policy, this study can be helpful in understanding the relationship between the social consequences and effects of a pandemic and the degree of human society's development. The authors noted the cumulative social changes and the unfavourable responses to COVID-19. Therefore, this study proves the social experience of the pandemic in order to further make adjustments in social policy.

As mentioned previously, this paper made numerous new contributions to the study of issue, including the identification of diverse social consequences and effects of COVID-19; finding the pandemic's impact on education in the context of social policy; establishing its socio-political and economic consequences; and substantiating psychological reactions to the pandemic. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic can differentiate spatially and among social groups. The impact of the pandemic can vary significantly depending on geographical locations, economic conditions, and social demographics. The bibliographic method of study and the use of Scopus helped to find these differences. Here are some ways in which pandemic consequences can differentiate spatially and among social groups:

- **Geographical variation:** the spread and severity of the pandemic can vary across different regions and countries. Some areas may experience higher infection rates and healthcare burdens than others, leading to differing social and economic consequences.
- **Socioeconomic disparities:** social groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds may experience varying impacts of the pandemic. Lower-income individu-

als and marginalised communities may face greater challenges in accessing healthcare, education, and financial resources, exacerbating existing inequalities.

- **Access to healthcare:** spatial differences can impact access to healthcare facilities and resources. Rural areas, for example, may have limited healthcare infrastructure, leading to disparities in testing, treatment, and vaccination rates compared to urban centres.
- **Educational disparities: students from different social groups may have** varying access to remote learning resources, technology, and support systems. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle more with remote education, leading to potential learning gaps.
- **Mental health and well-being:** isolation and lack of social support can impact mental well-being, and certain social groups may be more susceptible to these challenges.

Thus, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are not uniform across spatial locations or social groups. There are significant disparities in the impact of the pandemic, which necessitates targeted interventions and support to address the unique challenges faced by different communities and regions. Understanding these variations is crucial for effective policymaking and resource allocation to mitigate the pandemic's adverse effects on vulnerable populations and locations.

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