

**TO START A NEW LIFE
SELECTED MATTERS FROM THE FIELD OF REFUGEE
PROBLEM**

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Foreword

This publication is addressed primarily to the foreigners, seeking, in Poland, refuge from persecution that is to persons applying for the refugee status recognised refugees and foreigners having a tolerated stay permit.

Those people observe with anxiety that despite living in a safe place, the state of their psychical and physical health does not improve and, in some cases, even deteriorates. Especially difficult for them is to control fear, anger and apathy. After a long, idle stay in a centre, it turns out that the necessity of living on one's own account in a foreign country abounds in a multitude of shocking problems, that it is annoying and arduous. A pessimistic assessment of the future, cultural differences and the lack of knowledge of the language, additionally make the adaptation to the new conditions more difficult.

This report tackles questions regarding the psychological problems of refugees, not only based on the literature on the subject, but also on the experiences collected during the direct work with several thousands of refugees from Europe, Asia and Africa. Those people breaking the barrier of shame and fear, decided to seek psychological help, despite the fact that in their countries this kind of support never existed or was a part of the reprisal system. It can be ventured that with their courage they "cleared the way" for other patients-refugees who are now more encouraged to use the professional psychological support and to a greater extent perceive the connection between the tragic experiences of their lives and health-related problems.

This publication also contains information from the field of social assistance, indispensable to all foreigners settling down in Poland as well as addresses of institutions helping migrants.

The guidebook was compiled thanks to the grant from the European Refugee Fund, which Caritas Polska received in 2006.

Centres for Assistance to Migrants and Refugees, which support foreigners independently of their religion, legal or social status have been operating within Caritas structures incessantly for the past 12 years. They render free psychological, social and legal assistance. The Centres organise Polish and English language courses, assistance in learning, activation courses or casual events. The most needy refugees are supplied with the indispensable hygienic articles, school aids, food, medicaments or clothes. All these actions are geared to supporting the difficult process of foreigners' social integration.

An important element of the operation of Caritas Centres for Assistance to Migrants and Refugees are educational actions and campaigns addressed to children, youth and adults. They are aimed at counteracting discrimination and social exclusion of foreigners.

With the support of the Chair of Health Psychotherapy and Psychology of the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), research is carried out regarding the influence of the post-communist stress on the psychological condition, social functioning of the refugees and the course of the integration process.

I hope that this publication will be useful both for the refugees and all the persons working with them.

Marzena Piłat

Consequences of suffering caused by war and persecutions

Misfortunes meeting people, who must leave their homeland in fear of the loss of life, lay at the foundation of the emergence of psychological and physical disturbances. In case of refugees, researchers diagnose a number of psychological disturbances, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), exhaustion by struggle, reactions to mourning¹. They record suicidal attempts or alcohol, medicament and drug addiction.

An extreme environmental stress leaves its traces in the form of what is known as psycho-somatic diseases, like coronary, ulcer disease, hypertension, feeding disturbances, sleep, sexual disorders and some kinds of allergy². Its influence on the emergence or sharpening of the already present sickness process leaves no doubt.

Pioneering research of physiologists described stress as a response to a situation evoking threat to which a given organism can prepare itself and react adequately. Selye³ distinguished distress and eustress, that is stress exerting a negative or positive influence on human beings. Eustress mobilises us to undertake action, while distress is a reaction to threat and is always connected with unpleasant emotions.

Selye has distinguished the phases of the development of distress reactions. The first phase is an alarm reaction to the threat and resisting it. The second is to gather all ways and means to oppose the danger and getting gradually “accustomed” to functioning in distress conditions. The third stage is exhaustion. Selye pointed out that cumulated, harmful reactions could contribute to the emergence of a disease and in extreme cases, even to death.

The extreme stress – all kinds of terror – exerts enormous influence on the functioning of victims not only when the persecution is still in progress but also after its termination. Physiological and psychological reactions as well as social functioning of the victims undergo serious distortions.

Traumatic experiences can result in insanity, including the characteristic kind of disorder in the form of the post-traumatic stress. Its symptoms cover: excessive excitation, the feeling that the misfortunes may happen again, difficulties with the concentration of attention, sleep, recollecting certain aspects of the trauma or control of the attacks of aggression and anger. The affected person is trying to avoid the circumstances, places and stimuli associated with the trauma.

The isolation of the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a separate disease occurred only in 1980. It happened on the basis of clinical data collected from soldiers of the two world wars, inmates of Nazi German concentration camps and also from women and children affected by home violence.

¹ Ajdukovic M., Displaced Adolescents in Croatia: Sources of Stress and Posttraumatic Stress Reaction, *Adolescence* 33(129),1998, ss.209-217.

² Everly Jr.G.S, Rosenfeld R., *Stres. Przyczyny, terapia i autoterapia*, Warszawa 1992; Ściągła E., *Poznawcze uwarunkowania choroby wieńcowej i zawału serca*, Poznań 1993; Tylka J., *Psychosomatyka, wybrane zagadnienia z teorii i praktyki*, Warszawa 2000.

³ Selye H., *Stres życia*, Warszawa 1963; Selye H., *Stres okiełznany*, Warszawa 1977.

Still in the 1940's Kardiner⁴, Grinker and Spiegel⁵ characterised the symptoms of stress affecting soldiers. These were: fear, depression, sleeping troubles, over-excitability and aggression. It was found out that traumatic war experiences could destroy the life and health of nearly every human being.

Researchers have observed similar disorders both in case of war veterans and the civilians – victims of fascism, Hiroshima and Nagasaki or Khmer Rouge terror. They were affected by psychosomatic diseases and strong fear, depression, suicides, nightmares, memory troubles, the feeling of guilt and loneliness, aggression and conflicts with the law⁶.

The psychological symptoms of PTSD, similar to those occurring in case of veterans from Vietnam, were observed also in case of maltreated and sexually harassed women and children⁷. Judith L. Herman⁸ is of the opinion that the situation of women and children subjected to family terror should be compared with the situation of men taking an active part in hostilities. The post-traumatic symptoms in those groups are identical, though caused by different factors.

The posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can affect people in any age and the following factors influence the development and course of this trouble:

- features of the factor that causes it: duration, force, repeatability
- features of the victim: age, sex, personality, the ways of coping with stress⁹.

The symptoms of the post-traumatic stress disorder usually appear three months after the tragic experience. It happens, however, that the PTSD assumes the form postponed by several months or even years. In case of armed conflict victims, the trouble is manifested in an acute form (not long after the war, up to five years, on the average) or delayed, manifesting itself after 15-25 years when victims feel no affection¹⁰.

⁴ Kardiner A., *The Traumatic Neuroses of War*, New York 1941.

⁵ Grinker R., Spiegel J., *Man under Stress*, Philadelphia 1945.

⁶ Kępiński A., Tzw. „KZ - syndrom”: próba syntezy, *Przegląd Lekarski*,1,1970,ss.18-23; Niederland W.G., The psychiatric evaluation of emotional disorders in survivors of Nazi persecution, w: *Massive psychic trauma*, red. H. Krystal, New York 1968,ss.8-22; Orwid M., Domagalska-Kurdziel E., Pietruszewski K., Psychospołeczne następstwa holocaustu u osób ocalonych i żyjących w Polsce, *Psychiatria Polska*,1,1994,ss.91-112; Lifton R.J., On death and death symbolism: The Hiroshima disaster, w: J.F.T. Bugental, *Challenges of humanistic psychology*, New York 1967,ss.195-206; Haley S.A., Treatment implications of past-combat stress response syndromes for mental health professionals, w: *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans*, red. C. Figley, New York 1978, ss.254-268.

⁷ Burgess A.W., Holmstorm L., Rape trauma syndrome, *American Journal of Psychiatry*,131,1974, ss.981-986; Walker L., *The battered women*, New York 1979; Roth S., Lebowitz L., The experience of sexual trauma, *Journal of Traumatic Stress*,1,1988, ss.79-107.

⁸ Herman J.L., *Przemoc. Uraz psychiczny i powrót do równowagi*, Gdańsk 2002.

⁹ Zdankiewicz-Ścigała E., Przybylska M., *Trauma. Proces i diagnoza. Mechanizmy psychoneurofizjologiczne*, Warszawa 2002; Piłat M., Zastosowanie noo-logoterapii w pracy z ofiarami konfliktów zbrojnych, w: *Człowiek Współczesny. Między rozwojem integralnym a dehumanizacją*, Lublin 2004,ss.59-60. Materiały z Międzynarodowego Sympozjum Noo-Logoterapii – w Setną Rocznicę Urodzin V.E. Frankla, 3-4 grudnia 2004, Lublin, KUL.

¹⁰ Op den Velde W., Posttraumatische stress-stoornissen, *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde*,133,1989,ss.1586-1593.

The symptoms of this disorder can stay for years. It was demonstrated by research on the former soldiers and inmates of Nazi concentration camps as well as victims of violations¹¹.

The post-traumatic stress disorder is often accompanied by other troubles. These are: depression, general phobia disorder, suicides and self-injuries, sleeping troubles, sexual and somatic disorders, phobias, short-time reactive psychosis and dissociation disorders (dissociation personality disorder, amnesia), abuse and dependence on psychoactive substances, anti-social personality disorders¹².

That is why, in order to avoid errors in diagnosis and therapy of persons after traumatic experiences, recognising the PTSD, taken into account should be the possibility of the emergence of other disorders.

In extreme situations like war, captivity and persecution, when the probability of the loss of life is high, some PTSD symptoms may be a specific kind of the organism's defence. Changed states of consciousness (dissociation, de-personalisation) listlessness to pain and fear often allow surviving the worst moments through the „psychical closure” to the horrible situation. Excessive excitation, in turn, manifested by increased vigilance and carefulness allows pinpointing the threat in time and reacting to it in an adequate way.¹³

Researchers are of the opinion that becoming a refugee is a protracted process in which three stages of traumatising of the asylum-seekers can be discerned.¹⁴

- I. phase of increased political reprisals and persecution in homeland,
- II. phase of traumatic experiences,
- III. phase of emigration and necessity of adapting to the new conditions.

The basic problem of those persons is to cope with the traumatic experiences. At each of the aforementioned stages of traumatising, the refugees encounter different kinds of dangers and critical situations. These problems must be solved despite the lack of experience, material means, support on the part of family and friends. If this fails, the post-traumatic symptoms will increase, which will adversely affect the family and professional life of the victims of persecution.

¹¹ Eaton W.W., Sigal J.J., Winfeld M., Impairment in Holocaust Survivors After 33 Years: data from an Unbiased Community Sample, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 139, 1982, ss.773-777; van Dyke D., Zilberg N. J., McKinnon J. A., „PTSD: A 30-year Delay in a WW II Combat Veteran”, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 142, 1985, ss.1070-1073; Burgess A.W., Holmstrom L., Adaptive Strategies and Recovery from Rape, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 136, 1979, ss.1278-1282; Nadelson C.C., Notman M.T., Jackson H., i in., A Follow-up Study of Rape Victims, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 139, 1982, ss.1266-1270.

¹² Green B.L., Psychosocial research in traumatic stress: An update, *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 7(3), 1994, ss.341-362; Heitzman J., Rutkowski K., Zaburzenia psychiczne u osób prześladowanych z przyczyn politycznych w Polsce w latach 1944-1955, *Psychiatria Polska*, XXXI(2), 1997, ss.153-164.

¹³ Kępiński A., *Rytm życia*, Warszawa 1992; Frankl V.E., *Homo patiens. Próba wyjaśnienia sensu cierpienia*, Warszawa 1998; Zdankiewicz-Ścigała E., Przybylska M., *Trauma. Proces i diagnoza. Mechanizmy psychoneurofizjologiczne*, Warszawa; Herman J.L., *Przemoc. Uraz psychiczny i powrót do równowagi*, Gdańsk 2002. Kępiński 1992; Frankl 1998; Zdankiewicz-Ścigała, Przybylska 2002; Herman 2002

¹⁴ van der Veer G., *Counselling and Therapy with Refugees and Victims of Trauma. Psychological Problems of Victims of War, Torture and Repression*, Chichester, New York, Weinheim 1998.

That is why, next to the social support, professional psychological assistance is an important form of help. Researchers specialising in refugee problems underscore the need of this type of assistance with special attention laid on the overlapping of cultural differences on the process of diagnosis and therapy of the asylum-seekers¹⁵.

Practical advice – summary

If you are a person seeking refuge in Poland from persecutions you have experienced or witnessed, you should know that:

- Somatic symptoms you observe in yourself or your near ones may be an effect of extreme stress like war, tortures, violations or other kinds of violence. Many somatic diseases have their roots in strong traumas. If you notice that in certain situations painful recollections recur immediately followed by a deterioration of your feeling (headaches, heart or stomach trouble) do not panic, but neither ignore such symptoms. First see a doctor to preclude the possible organic causes. If the doctor does not diagnose a somatic disease, see a psychiatrist or psychologist.
- Worrying physiological reactions, like the growth of blood pressure, faster heartbeat, muscle tension, troubles with the alimentary system, are a typical response of the organism to the threat, both real and imagined. These reactions adapt the organism to an escape or struggle in the defence of life. So, even in situations only reminding danger, you observe similar states, which are arduous for you, seek specialist advice.
- Do not disregard states of strong fear and nervous tension, repeated nightmares, attacks of aggression, memory troubles – if you notice any of those symptoms – see a specialist.
- Never use alcohol or drugs as sedatives. **Addiction to them is a disorder often accompanying the post-traumatic stress that is why you must avoid those substances!**
- If you see that, while playing, your child consistently repeats the traumatic events, has nightmares, paints the same sad or tragic pictures depicting, for example, bombardments, wounded or killed people – see a psychologist.
- If you are thinking about death all the time, if you see no sense in life and have suicidal thoughts – you must tell about it somebody from your family, a doctor, a public worker or a nurse.

¹⁵ Vontres C.E., Racial and ethnic barriers in counseling, w: Counseling across cultures, red. P.B. Pederson, J.G. Draguns, W.J. Lonner, J.E. Trimble, Honolulu **1981**,ss.87-107; Mollica R.F., Wyshak G., Lavell I., The psychosocial impact of the war trauma in Southeast Asian refugees, American Journal of Psychiatry,144,**1987**,ss.1567-1572; Dahl C., Some problems of cross-cultural psychotherapy with refugees seeking treatment, American Journal of Psychoanalysis, 49,**1989**, ss.19-32.

- Do not conceal your bad feeling and depression before your near ones. Talking about your problems helps finding ways for solving them.
- Do not blame yourself for helplessness or inability to cope with tragic situations. In conditions of terror, which the victims of wars and persecution experience, there is often no possibility of opposing evil. Rare are the cases when an effective help can be extended to all those in need. If you are ashamed of your behaviour and have the feeling that you behaved not in the way you should, and you have remorse of conscience because of that, see a psychologist.
- In Poland, foreigners with diagnosed psychical disorders, seeking the refugee status can ask for the presence of a psychologist or a doctor during the status interview. This type of support should be addressed to the Office for Repatriation and Foreigners, psychologists, doctors, employees of the Centre. In such a situation, a psychological diagnosis using tests is most often carried out (M. Pilat's Trauma Intensity Scale is one of them). On many occasions, the employees of the Centre themselves organise psychological help for the asylum-seekers, and in the most serious cases, carry out the status interview in the foreigner's place of abode.
- If you cannot cope with your own anger, raise rows, which you regret later on but you are unable to change your behaviour – see a specialist for help. **Remember that psychical or physical maltreatment of another person (child, wife, husband, parent) is a crime and is liable to punishment!**
- If you are a home violence victim, report it to the employees of institutions helping refugees or directly to the crisis intervention centre or the police (addresses and telephones can be found at the end of this publication).
- Combining pharmacotherapy with psychological assistance brings good results, so do not hesitate to seek aid at a psychiatrist or psychologist.
- Do not administer drugs without consultation with a doctor.
- For many foreigners, asking for psychological assistance is the extreme, which they would like to avoid. This is a natural reaction of each man but it should be treated in the same way as, say, fear before going to a dentist. Civilisation progress is followed by an increasing number of psychical disorders – in the United States and the EU countries, very many people avail themselves of psychological assistance to nobody's surprise.
- Remember, therefore, that applying for a psychological advice does not mean that you will be placed in a psychiatric hospital. You should also remember that in Poland, as indeed in other EU countries, the psychologist is bound to loyalty and discretion towards the patient.

- Many refugees do not want to use the help of a psychologist who does not speak the language familiar to them and they find the presence of an interpreter embarrassing. In such a case, it is worthwhile to try to seek a specialist with the command of the language that would facilitate a direct contact. You can go to the employees of institutions helping foreigners for advice.

Despite psychological problems resulting from the trauma, you have to think about the future that is about starting an independent life in a new country that is why:

- Waiting for your application to be examined by the Office for Repatriation and Foreigners, try to rationally use your free time. Remember that in the centre for foreigners you do not have to worry about many things or formalities, there is no need of going to work and staying outside home for at least eight hours a day. **Make good use of it, earmarking the time you have for education and a return to your psychological balance.**
- Take an active part in the educational programmes offered by the centres and non-government organisations – **learn the language in the first place!** During the course you can suggest to your teacher proposals of subjects you are interested in or, which are or will be most useful for you.
- Encourage your near ones to learn, in particular care for the access to education for your wife or daughter. **Remember that in Poland, the subsistence of a family from a single wage is very difficult and working women is a common and appreciated phenomenon.**
- Do not get discouraged with the initial failures in learning and remember that the first two or three months are the most difficult. **Attending classes systematically will help you overcome the difficulties.**
- A number of non-government organisations propose foreigners to take part in classes, which will facilitate them to get to know the new country better and to adapt to it. The offer includes linguistic or computer courses, lectures presenting culture, history or customs of the accepting country. The organisations are open to the proposals of the refugees themselves, so do not hesitate to come up with your ideas. **Avail yourself of this type of free aid because after starting the life on your own account, you will have to pay for such courses.**
- There is a school duty in Poland – even for special care children. **Not sending the child to school you run a risk of conflict with the law and close the road to a better life for your child!**
- Some foreigners sending their children to school are interested only in receiving the equivalent. They are not interested in their solid education so very important and highly valued in Europe. **Do not rest content only with sending your child to school, but observe him, ask how he feels in his class and whether he has**

friends, discuss all the events in school with him! Follow his progress in learning, contact his teachers and help in doing homework. If you cannot cope with it yourself – turn to a non-government organisation. Its employees and volunteers will help your child overcome the learning difficulties.

- Many foreigners, after leaving the Centre, complain about the difficulties in solving everyday problems and the deterioration of their state of health. Having no command of the Polish language they can neither find a job nor a comfortable place of abode, have trouble with fixing formalities in offices, schools, hospitals. All of a sudden, it turns out that it is not easy to make payments and shopping in time, care for children and running household. There is no energy for seeking a job and there is no time for learning. The refugees are tired with the financial problems, the necessity of safeguarding family livelihood and quick fixing of formalities connected with the legalisation of stay. **To avoid situations of this type, use the period of staying in the centre for improving you abilities and qualifications!** However, if you are still in such a situation – apply for help to the employees of non-government or social assistance organisations.

Remember:

If you experienced extreme violence – were a victim of persecution, tortures or witness of aggression in relation to other persons and in this connection you feel troubles of psychical or physical nature, do not hesitate to ask a psychologist experienced in work with refugees and migrants for help.

Asylum-seekers staying in centres for foreigners and the recognised refugees complain of physical and mental affections. They notice, that their behaviour undergoes changes and that – as they say – they just “do not recognise themselves”. Their worry connected with the state of their health increases, when despite numerous consultancies with doctors, the diagnosis is the same: nothing wrong is happening – it’s just nerves. But how to combine headaches, heart or spinal cord pains or – which is even more difficult – vision or memory disorders – with the tragic experiences? Nevertheless, there is a close tie between the psychical and somatic symptoms and the perception of these ties by a suffering human being is halfway to a success in recovering health.

That is why so important are all actions aimed at raising the victim’s awareness and knowledge about the effects of the experienced violence.

Social assistance allowances for foreigners

A person, who, in effect of tragic events in his homeland, must seek shelter outside its borders, in Poland, may receive assistance based on the provisions of the law on granting foreigners the right to the protection on the territory of the Republic of Poland of 13 June 2003.

Foreigners residing or staying on the territory of the Republic of Poland, who acquired the refugee status or a tolerated status permit, have the right to social assistance allowances. Entitled to this right are also persons who have the settlement permit, the long-term European Union resident title, and those, who received stay permit on Polish territory.

Depending on the situation, foreigners can apply for:

I. Assistance aimed at supporting the integration process.

Addressees of integration assistance are only persons, who acquired the refugee status.

II. Assistance according to general principles.

This form of aid is addressed to all foreigners authorised to social assistance allowances, *including those having the tolerated stay permit.*

I. Assistance aimed at supporting the integration process

A foreigner, who received the refugee status, can apply for assistance aimed at supporting the integration process.

The application for assistance must be filed 14 days after the date of obtaining the refugee status in the Municipal Centre for Assistance to Family. The application also covers minor children of a refugee and his spouse if they also have the refugee status. The assistance does not cover a refugee, who is a spouse of a Polish citizen.

While filing an application for granting integration assistance, the refugee should declare his wish to reside on a given territory and his readiness to the implementation of the individual integration programme, which will be drawn up with the life situation of the refugee in mind. The refugee is also obliged to state in writing that he has not filed a similar application on the territory of another province.

Attached to the application should be:

- xero-copy of the decision on granting the refugee status,
- xero-copy of residence card,
- xero-copy of Geneva travel document,
- other documents useful while preparing the programme.

The integration assistance covers:

1. Money considerations for upkeep and covering expenses connected with learning the Polish language.
2. Payment of insurance premium.
3. Public work.
4. Specialist advice covering in particular:
 - a) legal, psychological and family advice,
 - b) information about and support in contacts with other institutions, especially labour market ones, local communities and non-government organisations,
 - c) other actions supporting the refugee's integration process, defined in an individual integration programme.

The aid is aimed at supporting the integration process and is implemented within the framework of the individual integration programme. Before its elaboration, the refugee is informed about the conditions on which the assistance will be granted.

An individual integration programme is elaborated together with the refugee and cannot last longer than 12 months. It obliges the refugee to register in the labour office, active search for a job, attending the Polish language course, cooperation and contact with persons implementing the programme, taking up actions agreed upon with a public worker resulting from the refugee's life position.

The Municipal Centre for Assistance to Family is obliged to inform the refugee about the planned assistance, as well as the conditions for its discontinuation or refusal. The Centre pledges to support the refugee in contacts with the local community, help in finding a flat, launching a broadly conceived social work and actions stemming from the refugee's life position.

If a refugee resigns from staying on the territory of a given province within the period of the 12 months of the duration of the programme, it means he has resigned from its implementation.

The change of the place of abode is possible only in especially justified cases such as:

- taking up a job with the possibility of living on the territory of another district
- obtaining a flat on the territory of another district
- joining the families of foreigners possessing the refugee status, if there is a possibility of living together
- necessity of ensuring specialist medical treatment, requiring the change of the place of abode of the refugee or his family member.

In case of running for the change of the place of abode, the refugee files documents and statements confirming the existing situation.

During the implementation of the programme, an assessment of the refugee's progress in the integration process is made. Assessed is the degree and effectiveness of the linguistic education as well as professional and social functioning.

The assistance is withheld or refused if the refugee fails to comply with the provisions undertaken within the programme, uses the assistance in a way glaringly incompatible with the purpose for which it was granted, gives false information about his life position or stays in a health care institution for more than 30 days.

Money consideration amounts, which the refugee can receive during the implementation of the programme, depend on his life situation, the number of family members and the duration of the programme.

Money considerations for subsistence are granted primarily for covering expenses for food, clothing, footwear, personal hygiene and rents.

Money considerations for payments connected with learning the Polish language may be expended directly by the Social Assistance Centre.

II. Assistance on general principles

Assistance is granted especially because of:

1. poverty;
2. orphanhood;
3. homelessness;
4. unemployment;
5. disablement;
6. protracted or heavy disease;
7. family violence;
8. need for the protection of maternity or numerous children;
9. helplessness in care-upbringing matters and household running, especially in case of incomplete families with many children;
10. lack of ability in adapting to life of young people leaving care-upbringing centres;
11. difficulties in the adaptation to life after release from the penal institution;
12. alcoholism or drug addiction;
13. random event and crisis situation;
14. life or ecological disaster.

Social assistance can offer you the following support:

- *Social and specialist advice*
- *Non-money considerations*
- *Money considerations*

- ***Social and specialist advice***

If you are a foreigner and want some help or support, you can count on our public worker who is in charge of your problem. You can expect help in solving your personal or your family's problems. Our public worker can also help you in settling matters in offices and other important life problems.

Social Assistance Centres offer help in the form of specialist advice, especially legal, specialist, psychological and pedagogical, rendered to persons and families in a difficult situation who require support in solving their income-related problems.

➤ *Non-money considerations*

If you are a person affected by family violence, your children experience violence, are downgraded or annoyed, you can always turn to the public worker. You will not be left alone with your problems, and the public worker will try to secure support or will facilitate your contact with a specialist.

You should know that in Poland there are many institutions dealing with granting assistance to persons, who experience violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, helplessness in difficult life situations. You will find detailed information on the Internet, in social assistance or non-government organisations. Telephone numbers of selected institutions are also included in this publication.

In the city of Lublin, for example, one such institution is the Crisis Intervention Centre whose team includes psychologists, pedagogues, rehabilitants, public workers, a lawyer, a psychiatrist, specialists in addiction and violence. There is also a round-the-clock trust telephone 081 534 60 60.

The objective of the operation of the Crisis Intervention Centre is to render free help to persons in a difficult life situation in connection with:

- family violence
- addiction (alcoholism or drugs), own or family member's
- disablement
- protracted or serious own or family member disease
- helplessness in care-educational matters and running household, especially in case of incomplete families and families with many children
- need for maternity protection
- personal crises
- random events and crisis situations (e.g., loss of a close person, loss of job, assault, violation, suicidal attempt).

The institution renders assistance to persons who have been directed by the public workers or other institutions as well as those who came personally.

The scope and forms of assistance:

- **specialist advice** (personal, by phone),
- **psychological and therapeutic assistance** of short-term character – individual, group, family,
- **intervention assistance** - environmental visits, intervention conversations in case of reports on harming children, disabled and elderly persons,
- **immediate assistance to persons** in crisis situations, of abrupt or traumatic character like the loss of job, assault, violation, suicidal attempt,

- **legal advice and assistance** in preparing court and office writs, monitoring of matters together with the client, building up of a natural support system in family environment,
- **educational and training activity** in the field of the organisation of workshops and training sessions, conferences and meetings of institutions rendering help to people in crisis situations.

➤ ***Money considerations***

Entitled to monetary considerations from social assistance are persons, whose monthly wage does not exceed:

- PLN 477 in case of a single housekeeper,
- PLN 351 per person in a family with the simultaneous occurrence of at least one reason enumerated in points 2-14 (see: page 13) or other important circumstances justifying social assistance granting.

Persons, whose income does not exceed the income criterion, have the right to free social assistance considerations. The remaining persons bear partial or total payment for services, depending on their material and life situation.

Earmarked benefits

This benefit can be obtained for satisfying the indispensable living need, e.g., for covering partial or total cost of food, medicines, medical treatment, fuel, clothes, indispensable household utensils, minor repairs, and also the cost of medical treatment or in case of a loss, which a person or a family suffered in effect of a random event. In specially justified cases, the person or family having wages exceeding the income criterion can be granted a **special non-returnable earmarked benefit**.

Nursing services and specialist nursing services

These can be granted to a lonely person, who, because of age, disease or other reasons, requires other person's help. These services can also be granted to a person, who requires the help of other people, and to whom the family is unable to provide such help.

Nursing services cover assistance in meeting the daily needs, hygienic care, nursing recommended by a doctor, and, if possible, ensuring contacts with the environment.

Specialist nursing services are services adapted to the individual needs stemming from the kind of a disease or disablement, rendered by persons with specialist professional preparation.

Permanent benefit

Available for an adult person:

- lonely, totally unable to work because of age or disablement, if his income is lower than the income criterion defined in the law on social assistance,
- staying within a family, totally unable to work because of age or disablement, if the per capita family income is lower than the income criterion.

So, if you are a foreigner unable to work because of age or disablement, you can try to apply for a permanent benefit. A person, who has no valid documents confirming the inability to work, should apply for obtaining a decision on disablement in Poland.

Applying for the decision on disablement in the Opinion and Disablement Team, you should produce: filled up form of an application, opinion about the degree of disablement issued in the country of origin – translated into the Polish language, doctor's certificate about the state of health, documents confirming the disease process, other documents that may be helpful for issuing the decision.

If possible, the completion of documents should be done by the foreigner himself. However, in difficult situations you can count on the support of our public worker.

Periodic benefit

It can be granted to persons and families whose financial resources do not suffice for meeting the basic life needs, especially because of:

- protracted disease if the disease caused a growth of the cost of living due to the necessity of applying medicaments and their cost caused a meaningful harm in the household budget, transport to health centres, medical and rehabilitation treatments
- disablement, if it causes a growth in the cost of living.

Periodic benefit may also be obtained because of:

- lack of employment possibility,
- possibility of maintaining or acquiring the right to benefits from other social security systems (e.g. waiting for paying pension).

Applying for benefit from this reason you should produce the following documents:

- decision on the degree of disablement, inability to work or doctor's certificate stating disablement and documents confirming the incurred cost of medical treatment.

Granting the periodic benefit because of the lack of the possibility of employment obliges you to an active search for a job, which cannot be restricted merely to the registration in the labour office.

If you apply for social assistance benefit because of unemployment, you should take any job, even if it is incompatible with your qualifications. The only justified reason for a refusal is health contraindication.

Family allowances

If you are a foreigner, have the refugee status, tolerated stay permit, permit for settlement or European Union long-term resident title, have a child and are staying on Poland's territory, you can apply for family allowances, that is:

a) family benefit with statutory allowance because of:

- childbirth,
- care for a child during the period of taking advantage from the upbringing leave,
- lonely child upbringing and the loss of the right to the unemployment benefit due to the expiry of the legal period of its collecting,
- alimony advance money,
- lonely child upbringing,
- child upbringing in a family with many children,
- education and rehabilitation of a disabled child,
- start of the school year,
- taking up by the child of education outside his place of abode.

Entitled to family benefit with legal allowances are those persons, whose family income does not exceed **PLN 504** net, or in case of a disabled, moderately disabled child or a child with a considerable degree of disablement – no more than **PLN 583** net a month per family member.

b) nursing allowance

Nursing allowances are granted to: parents of a disabled child, protectors of a disabled person above 16 years of age if the person is considerably or moderately disabled and if the disablement arose before the age of 21.

c) one-time allowance in deed of childbirth

The allowance is granted to the father, mother or legal protector independently of their wages. The application for payment of the allowances is filed within *three months* from the day of birth.

While applying for a family, nursing or one-time allowance in deed of childbirth, it is necessary to file an application together with a complete set of the required documents.

Collecting documents is a time-consuming process, connected with making translations of documents issued in the country of origin, waiting for obtaining the

PESEL number, waiting for the income certificate from the Revenue Office, etc. So, if you are sure that you are a foreigner entitled to take advantage from using the system of family allowances, you can start completing the indispensable documents earlier.

Procedures of proceeding while applying for social assistance allowances.

1. Reporting the problem to a public worker appropriate for the sake of the place of abode.

The application can be made either in writing or orally. If you are a person who has difficulties in using the Polish language, another person or an employee of a non-government organisation can help you.

2. Carrying out of the environmental interview in the foreigner's place of abode.

In order to determine the personal, family, health, income and material situation, the public worker carries out the environmental interview in the foreigner's place of abode. The environmental interview differs from the one held with persons applying for the refugee status. During the interview made by the public worker, you are obliged to give true data about the situation of a person or family, without omitting any important information regarding the disturbances in the functioning of your family.

The personal, material, income and health situation is determined based on:

- documents stating the foreigner's identity, that is the resident's card,
- documents confirming the foreigner's legal status, e.g., the decision on granting the refugee status, granting accord for tolerated stay, permit for settlement,
- child's birth certificate or resident's card, if the child does not figure in his parent's identity document,
- decision of an organ appropriate for granting old age or disability pension,
- statement of disability or disablement,
- employer's wage certificate in deed of employment,
- certificate issued by the school confirming learning in the post-secondary or higher school,
- certificates or decision of organs granting money considerations,
- statement regarding the material status,
- health certificates,
- certificates from the Labour Office on the possession of the unemployed person's status,
- other documents that may be helpful in assessing the life situation.

In view of the above, the completion of documents by a foreigner applying for support from the social assistance still before the visit of a public worker, may streamline the family support process.

3. Fixing the plan of action in favour of a person or family undertaken both by the public worker and the person applying for support.

Social assistance supports persons and families in order to meet their needs and their independence in life. However, it attaches special attention to using all circumstances oriented to the achievement of the goal, including the activeness of people taking advantage of social assistance.

4. Fixing and implementation of the assistance plan.

As it was said earlier, the financial assistance is adapted to the needs and possibilities of persons and their families. Awaiting financial help, the foreigner should not be guided by the principle that the assistance is due to all persons and families on equal terms, regardless of their family, health or material situation.

5. Systematic cooperation between the foreigner and the public worker in resolving difficult life situations.

Summing up:

If you are a foreigner, you can count on support on the part of the social assistance. However, the effects depend largely on you, your activeness in surmounting the indispensable life problems and acquiring the knowledge of the Polish language. Only a bilateral engagement in overcoming failures, can contribute to an improvement of your life situation.

Important addresses

Caritas Polska

01-015 Warszawa, Skwer Księdza Kardynała Wyszyńskiego 9
tel.: 0-22 334 85 22; fax.: 0-22 334 85 58
e-mail: caritaspolska@caritas.pl

Caritas Archidiecezji Lubelskiej - Centrum Pomocy Migrantom i Uchodźcom

20-950 Lublin, ul. Prymasa Stefana Wyszyńskiego 2 (wejście od Alei Unii Lubelskiej 15)
tel./fax.: 0-81 743 71 86
e-mail: migranci-lublin@caritas.pl

Caritas Archidiecezji Białostockiej - Centrum Pomocy Migrantom i Uchodźcom

15-077 Białystok, ul. Warszawska 32
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Caritas Diecezji Legnickiej - Centrum Pomocy Migrantom i Uchodźcom

59-900 Zgorzelec, ul. Ks. Domańskiego 12
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Caritas Archidiecezji Warszawskiej - Biuro ds. Migrantów i Uchodźców

00-322 Warszawa, ul. Krakowskiej Przedmieście 62, lok. 44
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e-mail: migranci-waw@caritas.pl

Centrum Interwencji Kryzysowej

20-086 Lublin, ul. Szewska 1
tel.: 0-81 534 81 41; fax.: 0-81 534 81 40
e-mail: cik@mopr.lublin.pl

Centrum Migranta

04-118 Warszawa, ul. Ostrobramska 98
tel.: 0-22 610 02 52;
e-mail: osrodek@migrant.pl

Fundacja - Instytut na Rzecz Państwa Prawa

20-023 Lublin, ul. Chopina 14/70
tel./fax.: 0-81 743 68 05; 0-81 532 40 69
e-mail: tsieniow@fipp.org.pl

Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka

Warszawa 00-018, ul. Zgoda 11
tel.: 0-22 556 44 66; fax.: 0-22 828 69 96; 556 44 50 lub 51
e-mail: hfhr@hfhrpol.waw.pl, sekretariat@hfhrpol.waw.pl

IOM - Międzynarodowa Organizacja ds. Migracji

00-302 Warszawa, ul. Mariensztat 8
tel.: 0-22 538 91 03; fax.: 0-22 538 91 40
e-mail: iomwarsaw@iom.int

Komendant Główny Straży Granicznej

Warszawa 00-562, ul. Koszykowa 16

www.sg.gov.pl

Klinika Prawa - Studencki Ośrodek Pomocy Prawnej

Wydział Prawa i Administracji Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego

Warszawa 00-071, Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28

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Powiatowe Centrum Pomocy Rodzinie

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Powiatowe Centrum Pomocy Rodzinie Radom

26-600 Radom, ul. Limanowskiego 134

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e-mail: sekretariat@mops.radom.pl

Warszawskie Centrum Pomocy Rodzinie

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Ośrodek Interwencji Kryzysowej

15-569 Białystok, ul. Włókiennicza 7

tel.: 0-85 744 50 28; 0-85 744 50 27 (całodobowo)

Polska Akcja Humanitarna

Warszawa 00-031, ul. Szpitalna 5/3
tel.: 0-22 828 88 82; fax.: 0-22 831 99 38; 828 88 82 w.217
e-mail: ucho@pah.org.pl

Polski Czerwony Krzyż

Warszawa 00-561, ul. Mokotowska 14
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e-mail: info@pck.org.pl

Rada do Spraw Uchodźców

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Regionalne Centrum Wolontariatu

20-213 Lublin, ul. Jezuicka 4/5 (I piętro)
tel.: 0-81 534 26 52; tel./fax.: 0-81 532 45 45
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Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej

00-391 Warszawa, Al. 3 Maja 12 lok. 510
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UNHCR - Biuro Wysokiego Komisarza Narodów Zjednoczonych ds. Uchodźców

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