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The activities of public organizations in overcoming the child homelessness and neglect in the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s

Abstract. The article describes the activities of public organizations in overcoming child homelessness and neglect of the USSR in the 1920s, showing their mechanism of functioning.

It has been proven that public organizations were actively involved in the protection of children and the fight against homelessness, neglect and juvenile delinquency. They provided individual assistance to orphans and half-orphans and were engaged in the prevention of homelessness. These organizations also organized patronage, assisted in the maintenance of childcare establishments, participated actively in the creation of institutions for children of the unemployed, and provided protection of minors' labor rights.

Keywords: public organizations, children's social inspections, "Children's Friends" Society, Commissions of economic assistance to kindergartens, Rural school support committees, Peasants' mutual assistance societies, Ukrainian Red Cross.

AT all times, there were some categories of the population who needed special attention and care from the people, community and the state. The First World War led to devastating consequences and aggravation of the economic situation of several European countries. The revolutions and wars of the twentieth century forced humanity to think of how social changes of this nature affected human life.

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The restoration of lost statehood and the establishment of the Republic of Poland ran into a number of urgent problems which needed to be solved. The effects of the First World War were both economic losses associated with the involvement of forces in warfare and damage inflicted by the enemy, who viewed Polish lands as a raw material resource. For example, in 1918 only 14% of its pre-war workers worked in the country. Another negative factor was population migration and recruitment of men into military service. The mobilization done on Polish territory occupied by Germany and Austria-Hungary covered men of working age. In addition, in 1915 about 1.5 million people were relocated to the east. This situation had led to a large number of children being left without parents and decent care. The complexity of the situation was clearly understood and therefore required self-organization of the population¹.

The Soviet and Polish authorities paid special attention to the legal measures to overcome child homelessness in the interwar period. These legal measures were not new for Ukraine but they had a deep historical tradition.

The issues of overcoming child homelessness and neglect were investigated by: O.I. Anatoliieva², A.H. Zinchenko³, A.O. Medvid'⁴, and O.S. Parashevina⁵; but their works partially revealed the activities of the state bodies, which made it impossible to speak about their specificity in general.

The purpose of this study is to unveil the activities of public organizations to fight child homelessness and neglect in the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s.

¹ A. Kotichenko, *Children in the Republic of Poland: main directions of social care*, "Ethnic history of the peoples of Europe: Collection of scientific works" 2016, Issue 50, pp. 86–89.

² O.I. Anatoliieva, *Legal regulation of the fight against homelessness, neglect and juvenile delinquency in the USSR in the 1920s*, [dissertation abstract], Kyiv 2003, p. 20.

³ A.G. Zinchenko, *Children's homelessness in the Soviet Ukraine in the 20's – the first half of the 30's of the twentieth century*, [dissertation abstract], Odesa 2002, p. 17.

⁴ A.O. Medvid', *Social protection of homeless persons and homeless children*, [dissertation abstract], Odesa 2015, p. 20.

⁵ O.S. Parashevina, *The role of the public education system in overcoming child homelessness in the 1920s – the first half of the 1930s in Ukraine*, [dissertation abstract], Dnepropetrovsk 2004, p. 17.

In the 1920s, the USSR paid considerable attention to the involvement of the public in childhood protection and the fight against homelessness and neglect. Representatives of some non-governmental organizations (women's, youth's, and the Red Cross) were a part of the supervisory bodies – child protection councils and child support commissions. In 1920, social assistance units – children's social inspections were established at the department of social education by a Resolution of the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR. They were engaged in the identification of children in need of assistance and participated in measures to fight homelessness and juvenile delinquency⁶.

In 1922, the Code of Laws on Public Education was adopted in the USSR, according to which the main function of the children's inspection, whose workers were called brothers and sisters of social assistance, legislated to fight the neglect and delinquency of minors and, above all, prevent all of these phenomena. The responsibilities of the children's social inspection included keeping records of children, disclosing cases of exploitation and ill-treatment of minors at any enterprises and institutions, being on duty in public places for the identification of the homeless, beggars and offenders, and referring or accompanying them to child care institutions or to commissions on juvenile delinquency⁷.

The same year, public inspectors of the children's social inspection were hired to fulfill the duties of juvenile care examiners because at that time the country had a lack of such staff. They identified the basic principles of such personnel in the Circular of the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR dated from June 27, 1922. The public inspectors of the children's social inspection were to be trained by short-term courses or be given special individual instruction by experienced commissioners⁸.

The People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR tried to regulate and improve the quality of work of the children's social

⁶ A.H. Zinchenko, *Experience in overcoming children's homelessness in Ukraine in the 1920s*, Kyiv 1998, p. 35.

⁷ *Code of Laws on National Education*, "Collection of the Legislation and Resolutions of the Workers 'and Peasants' Government of the USSR" 1922, No. 49, p. 729.

⁸ *To all the Commissions for Juvenile Affairs: Circular of the Ukrainian SSR*, "Bulletin of the official orders and messages of the People's Commissariat of Education" 1922, No. 26, pp. 6–7.

inspection. The Regulation on the Children's Inspection of the Main Social Executive Committee of the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR in 1925 set out the legal status of inspections as well as the requirements for candidates for inspectors of children's social inspections and their responsibilities⁹. The aim of the Children's Social Inspections was to help the state bodies and institutions fight child neglect and juvenile delinquency. Accordingly, children's social inspections were organized under the authority of these bodies.

The Children's Social Inspection had been empowered. In addition to the duties assigned to inspectors by the Code of Laws on Public Education of the USSR, they were charged with bringing to justice those responsible for violating children's rights. Therefore, it was of great importance to give the staff of the children's social inspection service the right to apply for assistance to the police and other state bodies which were obliged to promote their work in full.

As far as the requirements for inspectors, the Regulation stated that the inspector of the children's social inspection may be a citizen of the Ukrainian SSR and be at least 21 years old with sufficient theoretical and practical training. It was forbidden to involve persons who were under investigation or in court, as well as restricted in rights by the court to fulfill the functions of inspectors. In cases where it was not possible to set up an inspection, its functions were delegated to local authorities of child care or any public, professional, or party organizations¹⁰.

In 1928, the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR approved a new set of "Regulation on the work of children's social inspection". This document defines the structure, powers and some organizational aspects of inspections¹¹.

In this Regulation, the main tasks of the Children's Social Inspection was to identify children in need of assistance, to conduct the work with homeless and juvenile offenders on behalf of education authorities, to involve the public in these activities, and to instruct representatives of the organizations which took over the functions of the children's social inspection.

⁹ *Regulation on the Children's Inspection of the USSR*, "Children's Law" 1944, pp. 443–444.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Regulation on the work of the child social inspection*, "Bulletin of the People's Commissariat of Education" 1928, No. 5, p. 66.

Children's Social Inspections organized the activities in several aspects, each having its own specific tasks. Thus, the obligation of the children's social inspection included asking the social security authorities for the provision of pensions or financial assistance to minors who were entitled to it, as well as to apply to local public organizations ("Children's Friends" and Peasant Mutual Aid Societies) and other state bodies regarding the financial support for minors.

Children's Social Inspections, working with juvenile homeless persons and offenders, were obliged to take measures to restore parental ties with the homeless and to return non-native children to their homes; to visit places of grouping of the homeless, arrange the latter for social care institutions, and carry out educational work with them; to identify the causes of the illegal behavior of minors and identify cases of violation of their rights; to counteract the negative effects adults had on children which led to committing crimes and drinking alcohol; and to assist in the criminal prosecution of these persons.

Inspectors of the children's social inspection in the field of homeless and neglected children were also required to inform the local custody bodies about the need for guardianship and assist in finding the guardians; supervise their property protection; monitor the process of giving homeless and neglected children some medical care, or arrange health care for them; and provide extraordinary admission of homeless and neglected children to social care institutions.

Social inspections had been given a number of responsibilities in protecting the rights and interests of homeless and neglected children. In particular, they were to identify cases of unjustified dismissal of children from social care institutions, observe the right to education of working teens, supervise the living conditions of minors and those transferred to patronage, and inform local guardianships and educators about the guardians' and patrons' abuse. In order to protect the labor rights of minors, the inspectors of the children's social inspection were to monitor the registration of teenagers on labor exchanges, their extraordinary employment, to contact employers directly for providing employment, to supervise the working conditions of minors, to report to the labor and education authorities on any kind of abuse, and to identify cases of their exploitation.

Much attention was paid to the protection of the rights of minors in the administration of justice and of the execution of sentences. The workers of the children's social inspection had to visit juvenile detention facilities to speed up the consideration of cases, to transfer imprisoned juveniles to separate jail cells or other institutions, to promote their early release, and to improve educational work.

The responsibilities of inspectors of the children's social inspection included legal assistance when needed, seeking legal advice; and in simple cases of obtaining documents and certificates, they could resolve the issue on their own.

The work with adults, in particular with parents, was one of the important areas of the children's social inspections' activities. Inspectors had to inform parents about their duty as far as their children were concerned in order to prevent the violation of their children's interests. In the case of any problems, the issue of bringing parents to justice would have been raised. The representatives of the children's social inspections made speeches at meetings with workers and peasants on the basic principles of social and legal protections of minors, the fight against homelessness, the work of state bodies in this field as well as appealing to the population to provide material and organizational assistance in moving children to child care institutions, and organizing leisure activities for children.

However, to perform the duties of the children's social inspections effectively, meant properly organizing their work. Therefore, the above-mentioned Regulation established a special procedure for carrying out specific measures. Thus, the inspectors of the children's social inspection had to, if necessary, provide assistance or protection to the child, and on the instructions of the educational authorities, would have to carry out a preliminary examination of their living conditions. During the survey, a special questionnaire was filled out and an act was drawn up which recorded the conclusion of the necessary form of assistance or protection for the minor. The documents were then submitted to the education authorities, which gave permission for the respective measures. At the same time, the powers of the inspector were confirmed by a special mandate signed and stamped by the local education authority.

Much attention was paid to the organization of the structure of the children's social inspection in *The Regulation on the Work of the Children's Social Inspections*. In particular, it was found that the formation of the inspection apparatus should consist of a limited number of staff members from education authorities, as well as voluntary representatives from non-governmental organizations, the number of which is determined by the education authorities by calculation: one inspector for 300–500 children living in the area.

People with the required qualifications and experienced in pedagogical and community service could work in the staff of the children's social inspection. Teachers who had shown an interest in fighting child homelessness and neglect, students of pedagogical universities and workers with experience in community service had been invited to fulfill the duties of voluntary inspectors. Voluntary employees of the children's social inspection were necessarily trained during the seminars.

The departments for the social and legal protection of minors of the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR were entrusted with the general management of the children's social inspection. The voluntary inspectors were grouped territorially into groups headed by labor triads. The three dealt with work planning, examining education directives and reviewing reports. Children's social organizations had to organize a plenary session of the settlement every three months and to convene conferences with representatives of inspections annually to summarize and discuss the organization of new ways of work and to exchange information and experience.

On January 30, 1930, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR issued the Circular *On the organization of children's social inspections in places where they are absent* in which it recommended its local authorities create children's social inspections and involve them actively in their work¹².

During the period under review, another public organization „The Children's Friends” Society was created, it was especially designed to work in the field of child care and the control of homelessness, neglect and juvenile delinquency. The centres of the Society appeared on the initiative of the Central Commission of the

¹² *On the organization of children's social inspections in places where they are absent*, “Bulletin of the People's Commissariat of Education” 1930, No. 6, p. 13.

Assistance to Children in 1924. The same year, *The Regulation on Centres of the Children's Friends at enterprises and institutions* was published¹³. The normative act regulated the tasks and powers of the centres, their structure and the procedure of their work.

Their tasks included conducting measures for rescuing children on behalf of state bodies or on its own initiative, improving their situation; assistance to the homeless; financial support for children's institutions; assistance to labor protection authorities in overcoming the violations of the labor rights of minors, as well as telling the employees at their enterprise about the situation of children, necessary measures of child protection, and attracting new members to the "Children's Friends" society.

The right to seek the assistance of all administrative bodies was of great importance for the members of the centres. Thus, without the rights of a legal entity, they acted as local bodies of the Central Commission of the Assistance to Children, Commissions of Social Education and of Health Care, on the basis of their special mandates.

The staff in these centres consisted of all the employees of the enterprise, as well as members of their families. The presidium ruled each centre, was elected for 6 months, and consisted of three people who shared the responsibilities of a chairman, a secretary and a treasurer. The Presidium had to do its current work: collect contributions, collaborate with government agencies, and manage cash at work. The general meeting of the centre approved the current plans, established membership fees, and listened to and approved the reports of the presidium.

The centres of "Children's Friends" were engaged in self-financing. The Regulation ruled the formation of the budget from membership dues, fees, donations, sums from concerts, performances, other cultural events, as well as profits from enterprise productions organized by the society with the consent of the Central Commission of the Assistance to Children. The Commission monitored the activities of the Children's Friends centres, namely by the review of the records of meetings of the Presidium and the approval of cost estimates.

¹³ *Regulation on centres of the Children's Friends Society at enterprises and institutions*, "Children's Law" 1924, pp. 22–23.

It is worth saying that the centres of “Children’s Friends” were constantly growing. Later on, they were created not only at enterprises, but also at educational institutions, military units, hospitals, and clubs. The Resolution of the People’s Commissariat of Education of the USSR of 1928 approved the Instruction on the organization and operation of the centres of the “Children’s Friends” Society in cities and villages.

The instruction to urban units included four main areas of activity: operational, organizational, financial and campaigning¹⁴.

The document regulated the implementation of the operative work of centers in assisting children. There were several main areas of activities:

- 1) individual assistance to orphans and half-orphans,
- 2) organization of patronage (finding families who could take the child to school, providing them with financial support, and supervising the implementation of the patronage),
- 3) identification of cases of homelessness and neglect, and urgent assistance in their elimination and prevention,
- 4) assistance in the maintenance of childcare institutions,
- 5) participation in the creation of institutions for children of the unemployed,
- 6) safeguarding of minors’ labor rights and fighting unemployment among them (supervising the observance of the rules of job booking places for teens, identifying employment opportunities beyond the norm of reservation, creating workshops for work and production training of the homeless and neglected, monitoring the conditions of work of children being trained at hand-icraft firms),
- 7) supervision of juvenile offenders.

This work also involved interacting with public bodies of education, health, labor and children’s social inspections.

The Regulation paid great attention to the financing of these measures. The sources of funds were traditional for the public organization – membership fees, first aid (collecting food products

¹⁴ *Instruction on the organization and operation of the centres of Children’s Friends in the city*, “Bulletin of the People’s Commissariat of Education” 1927, No. 35, pp. 5–7.

and linen), profits from specially created enterprises (tea, cafeterias, shops, and workshops), holding charitable shows, lotteries, selling badges, magazines, as well as donations.

Each centre had a 'PR' manager and if it included more than ten individuals, it elected a bureau and an audit committee. The Bureau accounted for all the members of the society, attracted new activists, developed work plans, distributed responsibilities, appointed representatives to assist the children's social inspection and social security bodies of minors, maintained relations with the authorities and organizations that dealt with child homelessness and neglect, as well as sought funding sources. The general meeting of the centre was to be convened every three months.

The so-called agitation work or campaigning occupied a rather important place in the life of the society too. It focused on the organization of courses, seminars, lectures, and presentations; publication of literature on the protection of children's rights, the fight against homelessness, and the work of society in this field¹⁵.

"The Instruction on the Organization and Operation of the centres of Children's Friends in the Village" had a similar form and content¹⁶.

The Children's Friends assisted the education authorities in bringing all under age children to school. Such tasks of the society were written out in the Circular of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR "On the participation of the 'Children's Friends' Society in the introduction of general education" on September 3, 1930¹⁷. In particular, the company should have assisted in the accounting of school-age children and explaining their work in public.

In the 1920s, other non-governmental organizations played a significant role in the formation of the education and training system. In 1923, special commissions and committees were set up for the economic support of children's institutions. Their activity was regulated by a number of departmental normative acts of the

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Instruction on the organization and operation of the centres of Children's Friends in the village*, "Bulletin of the People's Commissariat of Education" 1927, No. 35, pp. 7–9.

¹⁷ *On the participation of the Children's Friends Society in the introduction of general education*, "Bulletin of the People's Commissariat of Education" 1930, No. 37, p. 4.

People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR. For example, on January 18, 1923, a Resolution of the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR approved the *Temporary Regulation on Commissions of Economic Assistance to Children's Social Care Institutions*¹⁸. The Regulation specified the order of formation and function of commissions, features of their organization and their activities. The commissions consisted of representatives of education authorities, pedagogical councils of kindergartens, committees of the underprivileged and parents of students. The main task of the commissions was to raise funds for the teaching staff's maintenance, repairs, fuel purchase, and equipment.

On January 19, 1925, the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR approved the "Regulation on Commissions for Promoting Rural Schools"¹⁹. At the beginning of their work, the commissions performed only economic functions. With the adoption of the Circular of the People's Commissariat of Education of the USSR on January 13, 1926, "On School Assistance Committees", they were given such tasks as: a school alliance with the students' parents, informing the latter of the ideas of social education, the tasks of the school and the rules of the children's upbringing and care. The principles of using the Committee's funds had also become new. They were intended primarily to assist children from poor families, arrange workshops at schools and conduct health care measures and events²⁰.

In addition to non-governmental organizations established to fight homelessness, neglect, juvenile delinquency, to protect their rights, and those performing specific tasks in this field, organizations whose activities were in any way related to the protection of children were created.

There was the Peasants' mutual assistance Societies, which activities were governed by the Regulation of January 23, 1925. Their responsibilities included helping orphans, protecting their interests, fighting neglect and giving guardianship. The societies also had to assist public authorities in the maintenance and provision

¹⁸ *Short time Regulation on Commissions of Economic Assistance at Children's Social Education Establishments*, "Children's Law" 1925, pp. 26-27.

¹⁹ *Regulation on commissions for promoting rural schools*, "Children's Law" 1925, pp. 27-28.

²⁰ *About the School Assistance Committees*, "Bulletin of the People's Commissariat of Education" 1926, No. 2, p. 14.

of schools, orphanages, and free canteens²¹. The assistance could be labor, legal, natural or monetary. Legal assistance was provided by monitoring the proper allocation of land plots to children, preventing their eviction from premises, protection from exploitation and control over the granting of privileges established by law.

The Ukrainian Red Cross played a significant role in overcoming children's homelessness and neglect. The organization began its work during the Civil War. One of the main tasks of the Ukrainian Red Cross was to protect children from violence and cruelty during war times²².

In 1924, the *Regulation on the Local Committees of the Ukrainian Red Cross* was issued, according to which the tasks of the so-called Red Cross work included making shelters for homeless children and organizing workshops at them (or separately) for children to study a particular craft or agricultural work. The Regulation meant well-planned work for the Ukrainian Red Cross. Local committees had to develop a plan in accordance with local conditions and their material resources at the beginning of their activities²³. The same year, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine approved the entry of the Ukrainian Red Cross into the International Union of the Assistance to Children²⁴.

It should be noted that a children's department within the Ukrainian Red Cross was created, it accounted for 30–40% of all funds of this public organization. Assistance to children was carried out in three directions – fighting child homelessness, support for children of the unemployed and assistance to rural children²⁵.

In February 1926, the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee (AUCEC) and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR approved the *Regulation on the Red Cross Society of the USSR*. It defined the purpose of the society, the legal framework for the activity, the principles of cooperation with health authorities and the procedure for monitoring the activities of the Ukrainian Red

²¹ *Regulation on the peasants' mutual assistance communities*, "SU of Ukraine" 1925, No. 3, p. 21.

²² *About the Ukrainian Red Cross*, "PZ of Ukraine" 1920, No. 19, p. 376.

²³ *Regulation on local committees of the Ukrainian Red Cross*, "Children's Law" 1924, p. 24.

²⁴ *Record No. 10 of the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CP (b) U of 18 July 1924*, V. 49, pp. 5–6.

²⁵ A.H. Zinchenko, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

Cross. Some tasks of the society were the fight against social illnesses and medical care for children. They had to do this work, guided by the relevant international legal acts, under the supervision of the Presidium of the AUCEC and in cooperation with the People's Commissariat of Health of the USSR²⁶.

So, in the system of childhood protection in the 1920s, the priority was given to the activities of public organizations. At that time, these organizations were actively involved in child protection and care and the fight against homelessness, neglect and juvenile delinquency.

All public organizations created at that time to accomplish these tasks can be divided into three categories: organizations especially created for this work ("Children's Friends" Society and children's social inspections); organizations which performed specific tasks in this field (commissions for economic assistance to kindergartens and committees for the promotion of rural schools), and organizations which activities were related to the protection of children (Peasants' mutual assistance Society and the Ukrainian Red Cross).

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Działania organizacji społecznych w walce z bezdomnością i zaniedbaniem dzieci w Ukraińskiej SRR w latach dwudziestych XX wieku

W artykule opisano działania organizacji społecznych w walce z bezdomnością i zaniedbaniem dzieci w ZSRR w latach dwudziestych XX wieku, ukazując mechanizm ich funkcjonowania. Udowodniono, że organizacje społeczne aktywnie angażowały się w walkę z bezdomnością, różnego rodzaju zaniedbaniami i przestępczością nieletnich. Udzielały indywidualnej pomocy sierotom i półsierotom oraz zajmowały się zapobieganiem bezdomności. Organizacje te roztaczały także patronat, pomagały w utrzymaniu placówek opiekuńczo-wychowawczych, uczestniczyły w tworzeniu placówek dla dzieci bezrobotnych, zapewniały ochronę praw pracowniczych nieletnich.

Słowa kluczowe: organizacje społeczne, inspekcje socjalne dla dzieci, Towarzystwo „Przyjaciele Dzieci”, Komisje pomocy materialnej dla przedszkoli, Komitety wsparcia szkół wiejskich, Chłopskie towarzystwa pomocy wzajemnej, Ukraiński Czerwony Krzyż.