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The Urban Impact on Social Welfare in East and West Germany (1945–1990)

Traditionally, the local authorities were responsible for welfare services. The first decisive steps towards standardization were taken in the interwar years, when the so-called “*Richtsatzverordnung*” was issued in 1924. This recommendation determined the amount of benefit paid locally, which could be exceeded or undercut. The NS-regime did not fundamentally alter this regulation, even though a selection of recipients of benefits was made according to racial criteria. Besides, specific groups were privileged and granted the so-called “*gehobene Fürsorge*”, a higher level of welfare, based on distinguishing marks which were regarded as favourable.

Accordingly, the regulations for the welfare service were varied in the post-war years. However, the equal level of food rations for average citizens offered a starting point for the standardization of benefits, i.e. the rejection of local regulations. This principle was adopted by the central administration for work and social welfare (*Zentralverwaltung für Arbeit und Sozialfürsorge*) in the Soviet Occupation Zone. In correspondence to the establishment of uniform regulations concerning other aspects of social policy a recommended level of relief was devised. As in the West, the privileges of the “*gehobene Fürsorge*” were abolished.

In the West the “*Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge*”, a central body of local welfare authorities, vehemently rejected plans for centralization. The arguments of the local authorities were: a) The appropriate relief was necessarily different because of locally varying prices. b) The requirements of families could only be determined as the case may be, usually by a social worker authorized by the local authority. Consequently, benefit levels established in the West were standardized on a local level, but varied widely between regions. This strong differentiation was very distinct from the centralised control in the East.

Furthermore, in East Germany the state forced social work back into honorary office. The direction towards a higher degree of professionalism taken in the Weimar republic was abandoned. Social commissions were established instead, with members appointed according to political criteria by parties and social organisations. In the West, the government was considerably less influential. The local welfare authorities were consolidated. The large

charitable institutions kept their important position and the church held considerable responsibilities in the area of welfare services.

In the Federal Republic a standardized level of social support based on the principle of a uniform basket of goods did not exist until the introduction of the „Bundessozialhilfegesetz“, the federal public welfare law, in 1962. This meant a basic level of subsistence guaranteed by the state. In the East, welfare services increasingly lost significance: By the 1950s already the issue can be considered to be of marginal interest only. Whereas this tendency persisted in the East, the amount of social welfare claimed in the West increased from the 1960s onwards. In both states a simultaneous extension of the social services sector was taking place on the local level based on different priorities. Whereas the issue of social welfare services developed into the phenomenon of a “new poverty” in the West, it did not reemerge in the East until the fall of the Berlin wall.