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Digitization of Social Welfare Entities and Its Importance for the Effective Implementation of Social Services in the Public Management System

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Abstract: **Background:** For almost a decade, before the Covid-19 pandemic forcefully highlighted the importance of this area, the digital future of Europe had been the main focus of European Union politicians and senior officials. In February 2020, the European Commission published the communication "Shaping Europe's Digital Future," which outlines the European Union's digital transformation strategy.
Research objectives: This article aims to identify the information and communication technology tools used by a public entity providing social services such as a Social Assistance Centre (SAC). The SAC is the basic organizational entity implementing social policy goals in the social welfare subsystem, functioning in every municipality in Poland.
Research design and methods: The research method used in this article was a case study.
Results: The implementation of digital tools into the OPS enabled the entity to identify problems in real time and respond to them faster, make more accurate decisions faster and more efficiently, and access a huge amount of data that improved the analyses carried out.
Conclusions: The use of modern technologies in organizations providing social services contributes to a better use of available resources. In the broader perspective of city, regional, or national governance, the use of ICT provides new evidence for the design of community-based public policies and their adaptation to new realities, enables reforming the operation of public organizations, and increases the transparency of public sector activities.

Keywords: public governance, social policy, information and communication technologies, digitization
JEL Codes: H75

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1. Introduction

For almost a decade, before the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of this area, Europe's digital future had been the main focus among politicians and senior officials in the European Union. In February 2020, the European Commission published the Communication "Shaping Europe's Digital Future," which outlines the EU's digital transformation strategy. The Commission aims to achieve digital transformation in a way that benefits everyone – citizens, businesses, and the environment – and to build a digital society that respects the European

values of openness, fairness, diversity, democracy, empowerment, personal development, and social engagement (Shaping Europe's Digital Future, 2020). The outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic has significantly changed the world around us, radically modifying the role and perception of digital transformation and accelerating the process. Digital technologies are now essential to access most societal services, from health care to culture. This finds reflection in the "2030 Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade," published by the European Commission in 2021, which sets out the EU's goals for digital transformation by 2030. Digital transformation has the potential to become a key enabler of rights and freedoms, including social services. It can also activate a society in which people are able to participate in democratic life regardless of their geography, social position, or community-specific barriers (2030 Digital Compass, 2021). Therefore, the aim of this article is to identify the information and communication technologies (ICT) used by a public institution providing social services, such as a Social Assistance Centre (SAC). The SAC is the basic organizational unit that implements social policy goals in the social assistance subsystem, and it functions in every municipality in Poland.

We observe the growing importance of social services in the EU's approach to socio-economic development. Such a statement finds confirmation in the content of recent EU strategies and the directions and financial expenditures in the EU programming perspectives 2014–2020 and 2021–2027. It is difficult to define the concept of social services in science and practice. The way of their provision, the groups, and the scope stem both from the legal solutions adopted by EU countries and from the social policy traditions and welfare state models practiced in each country (Grewiński, 2021). In general, as a specific type of public service related to the maintenance of social infrastructure, social services refer to the creation of foundations that are essential for the sustainability of an entity such as the state, and they target meeting human needs. Social services shape the conditions of social life and affect the quality of life of individuals and the society as a whole. They mainly concern areas of government activity such as the provision of public education, culture, recreation, social housing, social care, public safety, and health care (Rogoziński, 2000). Scholars define social services as all activities directed at people, aimed at shaping and enriching their physical and intellectual resources, and resulting in the creation of human capital (Janoś-Kresło, 2002). Collective – that is, publicly financed – consumption meets the human needs which have a positive impact on the quality and utility of human capital, thus contributing to economic development and civilizational progress (Sochacka-Krysiak & Małkowska, 2003).

Grewiński (2021) emphasizes that social services relate to the direct satisfaction of an individual's needs, are person-centered, and aim to have a positive impact on their users. However, although the direct satisfaction of human needs is the primary function of social services, this does not distinguish them significantly from services in general, whose mission is also the satisfaction of their recipients' needs. What distinguishes social services from other services, such as commercial services, is that by satisfying basic human needs, the consumption of social services creates a stock of value in the human being, referred to as human capital, therefore contributing to the stimulation of social development, economic growth, and civilizational progress, and thus to the creation of social capital. Consequently, scholars see social services as having not only individual value but also significant value for groups, communities, and, ultimately, the society as a whole (Evers, 2005). This means that they serve socially useful purposes (Janoś-Kresło, 2002) and create public value (Ćwiklicki, 2023; Frączkiewicz-Wronka, 2014; Moore, 1995).

Grewiński (2021) classifies services by type into labor market services, social activation and integration services, social assistance services, education services, and health services; and by their recipients into services for families, people with disabilities, older people, and children and young people. In general, social services should be either universal or selective and targeted at different social groups according to their individual and collective needs. The recipients of social services should be not only marginalized groups or groups at risk of social exclusion, but also groups belonging to the middle and upper classes. The approach proposed by this author strongly emphasizes the active role of social services and their importance in achieving socio-economic development goals. Effective provision of social services is essential for the proper functioning of societies and economies, as it forms a source of benefits for all members of the community (Iwankiewicz-Rak, 2012).

Currently, the dominant public management paradigm fundamentally aims to economize the service sector, so it is important to analyze the results of digital solutions implementation in the social welfare sector, which provides social services. Such an analysis aims to identify the factors that influence the efficiency of public funds management and, in particular, the social welfare system, within which citizens receive a significant number of social services.

The social welfare system within which the provision of social services takes place is one area of scientific reflection and practical action of social policy. The literature on the subject, despite emphasizing the diversity of social policy (Kurzynowski, 2006; Supińska, 1991; Szarfenberg, 2008), points to its specific duality. On the one hand, social policy provides support to those who, for various reasons, whether culpable or not, are unable to meet their subsistence needs and fulfil the legal conditions for receiving social assistance. On the other hand, social policy has the potential of an active instrument for shaping human and social capital. In both the first and the second sense, social policy will only achieve its objectives through a system which can effectively serve citizens. In the context of practice, social policy, including its sub-discipline of social assistance, exists in the realm of public policies and programs that affect people's well-being (Midgley, 2009) and is therefore an area of enrichment for public management practice.

Public governance as a practical activity has existed since the dawn of statehood. For many centuries, however, it was a marginal practice because of the social functions of the state, although one should remember that there was always bread and games, with lions eating the victims. The dynamic development of public administration began after the First World War, and in the last decades of the twentieth century it became an important area of state activity for maintaining social order. In order to carry out its welfare functions, the state creates the public sector by defining the limits of interventions and the tasks of the bodies carrying them out, and feeds that system by defining the sources of funding for its activities. The role of the public sector is growing in all developed countries. Kleer (2005) emphasizes this fact, stating that the modern democratic state as an organization plays a special role in the socio-economic development of subordinate societies. Salamon (2002) adds that a wise and far-sighted state supports and programs active development by creating numerous instruments necessary to move toward prosperity. A statist state, centered on power elites and short-sighted, acting in an economically inefficient way to extract incremental political rents, and using the instruments of political entrepreneurship under the guise of supporting citizens, will inhibit the move toward prosperity (Salamon, 2002).

In supporting or hindering development, the state can employ many instruments typical of the times in which the state functions. One aspect typical of our times is the embedding of

the activities of the various market actors in the ICT reality, with all its opportunities and risks. This applies to all areas of socio-economic life, and the public sector is no exception. Thus, the importance and use of the opportunities offered by new technologies in the delivery and management of social services is increasing (Meijer, 2013).

Due to the rapid digitization of everyday life, coupled with the increasing computing power of computers and current cost-cutting policies, one expects ICTs to enable the involvement of different stakeholders and ensure their greater contribution to the effective delivery of social services (Linders, 2012; Clark, Brudney, & Jang, 2013). This is a consequence of the fact that information networks, where people collect and share information at scale, can both reduce the scale of bureaucracy and provide opportunities for faster and more effective communication (Lember, 2018). One can also employ ICT tools to enable public sector organizations to increase their capacity to collaborate with civil society and allow market sector actors to deliver social services effectively (Cordella & Paletti, 2018).

The contemporary challenges resulting from digitization, globalization, and social, economic, and demographic changes create new conditions for the functioning of public organizations. These new conditions have led to the implementation of different ways of action than before, directed at the development of society and the state, so that they support the knowledge economy and respond to contemporary social, economic, and demographic challenges, as well as to the challenges resulting from globalization and digitization (Ziemba, 2018).

The way in which the public sector, especially local government units, functions and organizes itself has also changed following Poland's accession to the EU and the need to empower local communities and pursue the objectives of the European Social Model (Rosati, 2009; Auleytner, 2018). The essence of the change is the move toward a focus on new manufacturing and service specializations, new forms of education and competence building, and new lifestyles in local communities appreciating the multi-sectoral social policy paradigm (Evers, 1995; Esping-Andersen, 2010; Grewiński, 2021), which means the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the process of shaping well-being as a consequence of the effective delivery of public services, including social services (Jenson, 2015; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2020). Improving the efficiency of service delivery is also a consequence of the impact on social systems of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, often referred to as Industry 4.0 (Choudhury, 2014).

2. Literature Review: Digitization in the Public Sector

The implementation of the Industry 4.0 concept has changed the management practices, the structure and characteristics of the jobs created, and the business models. The observed practice reveals many new applications outside the context of the manufacturing industry, for example in urban management, public and social services, and social and health care systems (Chute & French, 2019).

In the public sector, the effort to improve operational efficiency by modern technology applies not only to the actions of individual organizations that choose to do so, but also to entire areas of public service delivery, including social services through the implementation of relevant central or regional programs, thereby realizing the drive to transform the public sector toward Government 4.0 (Naqvi & Munoz, 2020). The transition toward Government 4.0 was not a single and short-term implementation of a specific technology. Rather, it is a long-term, evolutionary process of transforming the public sector to focus on the services delivered to citizens (Walencik, 2018), taking place in the following stages: (1) digitization – implementing

ICTs to improve internal processes and structures, e.g. launching websites; (2) transformation – implementing ICTs together with carrying out an organizational and process modification within the administration itself, without changes in relations with stakeholders, e.g. e-government; (3) engagement – the use of ICTs to support both the internal processes and the communication and relations of the public administration with stakeholders, e.g. e-processes, e-public services, e-governance; (4) contextualization – the impact of ICT use in public administration on the whole public sector and its stakeholders (Janowski, 2015).

The areas of digitization related to public administration concern different areas of socio-economic life. With the dynamic development of increasingly sophisticated ICTs, they are becoming alternatives to or replacements for the existing solutions. The main area of digitization expansion in public institutions is the creation of public e-services as a front office, which supports the interaction between the customer and the public institution, and the implementation of information systems as a back office, which sustains the back-end and internal processes in public institutions (Ziemba & Papaj, 2023). Moreover, the state coordinates digitization with the goals and tasks set by the eGovernment Action Plan and, above all, the closely related Operational Programme Digital Poland (OPDP) (Ziemba & Papaj, 2023).

Table 1. Digitization of the Public Sector in Operational Programs

Program	Activities
Operational Programme Digital Poland 2014–2020	Priority axis II. E-government and open government, including four measures: Measure 2.1 High accessibility and quality of public e-services; Measure 2.2 Digitization of back office processes in government administration; Measure 2.3 Digital accessibility and usability of public sector information; Measure 2.4 Creation of services and applications using eServices and public sector information.
European Funds for Digital Development 2021–2027	Continuation of projects implemented in OPDP 2014–2020. Priority axis II. Advanced digital services activities, such as: 2.1 High quality and accessibility of public e-services with emphasis on the improvement of e-State and e-Health services; 2.2 Strengthening the national cyber security system; 2.3 Digital accessibility and reuse of information; 2.4 Digital cross-sectoral cooperation (cooperation for digital solutions to socio-economic problems) with an emphasis on digitization areas such as health, energy, environment, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and maritime economy; 2.5 Support for digital skills, primarily advanced digital competences in data analytics and machine learning, robotics and sensors, e-commerce, cyber security, the Internet of Things, quantum computing or IT management and Industry 4.0.

Source: own elaboration based on Ziemba & Papaj (2023).

Digitization serves various purposes; above all, as already indicated, its aim is to improve the delivery of public services to citizens and the interactions of public institutions with business and citizens, and to achieve the empowerment of citizens through access to information or more efficient government management. Well-implemented digitization enables citizens, businesses, and organizations to interact with public institutions easier, quicker, and cheaper (Loberg, 2021). The pillars of digitization are: (a) *E-processes* (*e-processes*) – the use of ICTs to improve and enhance internal processes in public entities; (b) *E-public services* (*e-public services*) – the use of ICTs to provide public services and the delivery of public e-services to citizens, businesses, and public institutions; (c) *E-democracy* (*e-democracy*) – the use of ICTs to increase trans-

parency, public participation, and democratic decision-making in public institutions and public governance; and (d) *E-governance* (*e-governance*) – the use of ICTs for networking, namely establishing partnerships between public institutions and citizens, or businesses and NGOs (Ziemba & Papaj, 2012). The use of ICTs in the public sector continuously improves the process of delivering public services, including social services, to citizens. One instrument employed for this purpose is the Central Statistical Application (CAS).

3. Research Method and Material

The empirical material presented in this article results from using qualitative methods, including a descriptive case study that enables an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon and allows for a more profound understanding of complex processes and relationships. The case study is a widely employed methodology in the field of management sciences, where scholars scrutinize specific organizations or projects to comprehend their functioning and derive recommendations regarding optimal methods (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). It is an inductive approach that emphasizes a detailed analysis of a selected case rather than statistical generalizations. According to Yin (2014), a case study is a research methodology that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context remain unclear. The applied research method allowed for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon and, due to its elasticity and abundance of data, was able to identify future research directions. However, the case-study method limited the possibility of generalizing the results, and the continuation of the undertaken research on the concept requires the design of a quantitative study.

4. Results and Discussion: Central Statistical Application as an Instrument for the Digitization of Social Assistance

In terms of public management practice, the digitization of the social services sector enables the rapid acquisition, aggregation, synthesis, and eventual use of large amounts of knowledge in the decision-making process. An example of digitization in this sense is the Central Statistical Application (CAS), made available to users on January 1, 2014. The legal bases for its implementation and operation include the provisions of the Act of March 12, 2004 on social assistance: Article 17(1)(17) for municipalities, Article 19(17) for districts (*poviats*), and Article 21(7) for local government. The Act obliges local government units to prepare reports and submit them to the competent voivode in the form of an electronic document using the ICT system.

The CAS is an ICT system that supports reporting in many areas of social policy, including social assistance, family and foster care, family benefits, the maintenance fund, and the care of children up to the age of three. Selected data from field systems supporting the implementation of own and contracted tasks of government and local government administrative units serve to create the information necessary for decision-making and evaluating the results/outputs achieved. The central database collects information from, among others, the assessment of social welfare resources, departmental reports, and individual reports. Thanks to its flexibility, the CAS allows for a rapid creation of new reports and collection of necessary data from the units covered. The circumstances confirmed the functionality of the chosen solution when it proved able to quickly collect and use data during relief operations resulting from the development of the Covid-19 pandemic or the migration crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

One can access the CAS via a web browser. The range of reports available depends on the type of unit and its position in the reporting pathway. For example, in the case of the MRiPS-06 report, which concerns the institutional and human resources of social welfare units, the Voivodeship Office collects data from municipalities and districts and, after verification, transfers them to the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy (MRiPS). During the assessment of social welfare resources, the Regional Center for Social Policy replaces the Voivodeship Office in the reporting pathway. The CAS also enables receiving and sending messages from/to other users of the system. This is an independent communication channel that constitutes an internal communicator (Intranet) of the social policy units, thus overcoming several limitations of traditional e-mail, such as the number of messages sent at the same time or the susceptibility to spam filters. Moreover, the CAS allows user account integration with traditional e-mail, so that CAS messages – such as information about the publication of a report – can reach a personal account as e-mails.

A useful function of the CAS is the creation of summaries with varying degrees of detail. Depending on the access level, it is possible to generate tables containing data from individual municipalities and districts, one voivodship, all voivodships, or the entire country. Then, one can export a defined summary to an .xls file for further processing in a spreadsheet or specialized statistical analysis software. A significant role in the use of CAS belongs to detailed documentation, available both from the application itself and as a PDF file, as well as the data correctness verification system operating within it, consisting of rules whose task is to verify the logical and mathematical correctness of the information provided. The set contains hard, conditional, and soft rules. When hard rules apply, the user is able to transmit the report only after a correct verification. Regarding conditional rules, their non-fulfilment enables report transmission only upon entering a justification for the inconsistency that has occurred (Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, 2014). Soft rules draw attention to places where a potential error may have occurred, but they do not prevent report submission. The solutions used are quite effective in preventing the submission of erroneous data but do not eliminate such risks altogether.

The CAS provides the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy, as the body that defines and implements social welfare tasks, with access to a large amount of up-to-date and reliable information, which enables the Ministry to monitor the situation in many areas of social policy and to design future measures. The benefits of the CAS exceed the reporting resulting from the need to update reports. The data collected in Social Welfare Centers, Social Service Centers, and District Family Support Centers find application in the day-to-day work of these institutions, while the information aggregated at the voivodeship and national level makes it easier to compare the situation in one's own area with the values for other local government units or for Poland as a whole. The standardization aspect is also important: a common system for all voivodships makes it possible to obtain comparable data and facilitates the exchange of experience or staff training for local and regional users. Although the system does not directly benefit the clients of social assistance, the information it provides streamlines the optimal use of resources by effectively directing them to the places and communities that need them the most at a time.

The digitization of Social Welfare Centers was not uniform due to the conditions of financing the development of infrastructure and the purchase of equipment. The social welfare field received the system free of charge, but securing hardware and system requirements and Internet access was the financial responsibility of individual units.

Another example of implementing digital solutions in the practice of providing social services by a Social Welfare Center is the use of the POMOST system provided by Sygnity S.A., used in the Municipal Social Assistance Center in Sosnowiec. The POMOST system effectively supports the implementation of municipal and district tasks resulting from the Social Welfare Act and related legal acts. Thus, since the beginning of 2010, POMOST has been supporting the process of issuing decisions and their implementation in the unit. Initially, the system was accessible mainly to the employees of the Benefits Unit. Based on field family interviews conducted by social workers and submitted together with the documents collected during the administrative proceedings, the unit's employees entered the data into the system. Then, they created a family/individual file, recorded an application for assistance and an interview, including data on the personal, family, and income situation, identified needs and expectations, assessed the situation and the worker's conclusions, and devised a support and action plan for the person or family.

The system used by the unit had a sophisticated notification mechanism: for example, when entering data, the system sent a message if identical family data already existed, thus avoiding duplication of files for the same family/person; it also checked the accuracy of the citizen ID (PESEL) entered. Moreover, the system calculated the total family income, the income per person, and the income criterion for the person/family. It also suggested the amount of cash benefits according to the current criteria stipulated in the catalog of the Act on social assistance. Other functionalities of the system included the creation and printing of templates and draft decisions, and generating lists of cash benefit payments with the possibility of bank transfers, postal transfers, reporting on planned, paid, or realized benefits, and generating other information relevant to the center's workers. The system also ensured the generation of departmental reports required by the Ministry, currently submitted through the CAS.

Improvements in the functionality and updating of the system accompanied increased access to EU funding for the development of public sector digitization. The development and implementation of Emp@tia – a social security communication platform project, co-funded by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund – was a further step toward improving the functionality of field systems. The measures taken included the establishment of the Central Social Security Information System (CSIZS) and the Central Beneficiary Database (CBB), and the launching of an information and service portal (PIU Emp@tia). Among other things, the portal enables effective submission of assistance applications. The CSIZS is a communication platform in the field of social security and family, which provides access to and services for the comprehensive exchange of information via the Internet. The services in question cover the beneficiaries of social assistance, family benefits, alimony funds, and education allowances; they also support internal and external ICT systems, such as field systems or the systems used in other ministries and institutions.

The CSIZS enabled social workers to check the data of a beneficiary and their family members through a domain system after registering an assistance application. The new solutions proposed by the Emp@tia project coincided with the implementation of a project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the 2007–2013 Śląskie Regional Operational Programme (WSL ROP). The project in question was "Rozwój Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim – Gmina Sosnowiec" (Development of Information Society in the Dąbrowa Basin – Sosnowiec Municipality), and it concerned the design and implementation of construction works for a municipal broadband ICT network in Sosnowiec. In other words, the project provided the local offices of the Municipal Social Welfare Center in Sosnowiec with

access to ICT networks. The newly built broadband network offered the technical capacity to carry out secure connections, allowing the integration of the local offices into the Center's IT system and enabling social workers to use the POMOST field system.

The legal changes in 2016 made it possible to fill in the field family interview questionnaire electronically using an ICT system. Consequently, Sygnity developed an ICT system solution called WYWIAD Plus in agreement with the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy. The solution forms the Domain System Module (MSD) of POMOST and was made available to users on December 13, 2016. In 2017, the company started the training process for using the WYWIAD Plus module. In the Municipal Social Welfare Center in Sosnowiec, the large-scale development of the IT infrastructure began in 2018–2019, when the Centre's offices gained access to the Municipal Broadband Network and thus to the POMOST system. At the same time, from January 2018 to the end of June 2019, Sosnowiec implemented the project "Working for the People and by the People," which reorganized the Center's work. The project's financing was entirely external and came from the European Social Fund, Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014–2020, Priority II. Effective public policies for the labor market, economy and education, Measure 2.5. Effective social assistance.

The project's implementation aimed at increasing the professionalism and effectiveness of the Municipal Social Assistance Center as an institution of social integration in solving the problem of social exclusion by implementing organizational improvements which separated administrative work from social work and social services. Thanks to this project, the Center acquired, among other things, 24 laptops intended as mobile terminals for social workers, and installed WYWIAD Plus on those computers. As a result of the measures taken, by 2020 all the social workers of the Decision Benefits Unit working in the five environmental assistance sections had received devices with the WYWIAD Plus module installed, enabling them to prepare and update field interviews on the spot. Access to both the POMOST system and the WYWIAD Plus module requires the assignment of appropriate system rights and individual access passwords. The mobile terminals feature additional encryption software to protect against unauthorized disclosure of personal data and to provide a higher level of security for the sensitive data processed. The additional security of mobile devices is particularly important due to the high sensitivity of the data stored on them.

5. Conclusions

The role of ICT in the design and implementation of social policies is undeniable (van Gerven, 2022). One of the key areas where the role of digital solutions will grow is social welfare systems, which aim to promote social inclusion and cohesion. The creation of active multisectoral social policies, including the social assistance system, should rely heavily on data and digital technologies used to process entitlements to benefits and social services. The ongoing process of digitization increases access to ICT tools for the social assistance staff and enables continuous improvement of system functionality on the ground. Digitization is also advantageous to the beneficiaries because it increases the unit's organizational efficiency. The use of ICT tools by social welfare units (a) improves communication within the unit and streamlines the exchange of information between social welfare units and other institutions and organizations; (b) facilitates the rapid verification of data in the field system and improves the quality and reliability of the procedures carried out; (c) enables the collection of data in electronic form, improves their security, and more effectively protects personal data; (d) reduces the time

a beneficiary has to wait for a decision; (e) minimizes errors in the collection of data; (f) reduces the time and cost of handling procedures through the collection of data; (g) minimizes errors in the calculation of income, criteria, or amounts of benefits; (h) simplifies benefit implementation and limits the possibility of sending a transfer or transferring the granted benefit to persons deceased before decision implementation; (i) through the reporting module built into the field system, ensures quick access to a wide catalogue of data necessary to monitor the unit's tasks and prepare departmental reports; and (j) ensures efficient, effective implementation of the benefit granting process.

The use of modern technology in organizations providing social services, such as social welfare centers, improves both the delivery of these services to citizens and the use of available resources. Upon analyzing the results of digitization in the discussed social welfare centers, we observed that it enabled the identification of problems in real time and faster reaction to them; faster and more effective decision-making and taking more accurate decisions; and access to a huge amount of data, which improved the analyses conducted in the centers. In the broader perspective of city, regional, or national governance, the use of ICTs provides new insights for the design and adaptation of public policies implemented in local communities to the new reality, enables reforming the operation of public organizations, and increases the transparency of public sector activities. And by creating new channels of communication and thus improving the flow of information, it supports the active participation of citizens. Modern technology enables the simulation and optimization of social welfare, the forecasting of social expenditure, the detection of social welfare fraud and social risks, and the support of social workers (Naqvi & Munoz, 2020).

In conclusion, digitization is a means to achieve certain benefits, also in the context of social assistance. An example of digitization understood in this way is the Central Statistical Application (CAS) – an ICT system that handles reporting from different areas of social policy. Thanks to many useful solutions, it allows the collection of a large amount of reliable information in a short period – a functionality confirmed during the Covid-19 pandemic or the immigration crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. Owing to the CAS, the Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Policy is able to monitor the situation in the country and plan appropriate measures. The data available in the system can also serve bodies operating at the municipal, district, and provincial level, enabling them to compare the situation in their area with the provincial or national average. Although social welfare clients do not benefit directly from the system, the information it collects allows for optimal use of resources by targeting more effectively the places and communities with the greatest needs.

From the research material obtained, future research directions emerge. In our opinion, it seems particularly important to address efficiency assessment regarding the provision of social services in the public management system via the use of digitization tools. It is also essential to identify the forces supporting and limiting the digitization process in the public sector.

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