

Paweł Sękowski

Description for the general public in English:
“Activity of the International Refugee Organization in the post-war Europe :
The case of the caring action towards Polish displaced persons and refugees, 1947–1951”

The aim of the project is to develop the issue of the International Refugee Organization (IRO) in Europe in the years 1947–1951 – in the period of its activity, on the example of Polish *displaced persons* and refugees. Poles were the largest among all national groups eligibles to the protection of IRO. A new research approach – focusing on the IRO’s assistance provided to the Polish displaced persons and refugees in the post-war Europe, and on its results – will be different from the perspective prevailing in the existing monographs on IRO, in which the main subject of analysis is the internal structure of the Organization and the evolution of its objectives. In these works, the topic of Poles benefiting from the IRO’s assistance is just mentioned.

Moreover, the aim of the project is the analysis of the IRO’s activities, on the example of its caring action towards Polish displaced persons and refugees, in the context of earlier attempts to resolve the problem of refugees and displaced persons in Europe at the international level (as for example the activity of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – UNRRA), also the analysis of the impact of the IRO’s activity on the solutions adopted to help refugees in Europe after the liquidation of the Organization (mainly: the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

The applied research method will provide a critical analysis of the historical sources, mainly of the archival materials and press releases. The most important sources are the documents from the IRO archives, stored in the French National Archives in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, near Paris. Furthermore, the source materials produced by the administrations of the particular countries of residence of the Polish displaced persons and refugees covered by the IRO’s assistance, as well as the materials from the Polish archives will be examined. The author also intends to collect oral reports of still living former wards of IRO .

The expected results will constitute a significant contribution to the research on the history of refugees and displaced persons in the post-war Europe, as well as on the history of actions taken by the international community to solve the refugee problem. At the same time, the research results will broaden the knowledge about the history of Poles living abroad during this period. The issue of the IRO’s activity is extremely important from the point of view of understanding the history of Poles living abroad after the Second World War and this issue has been raised in the historiography only incidentally and the question of the IRO’s activities never constituted the main topic of these texts.

The main result of the project will be the publication of the monograph on the activities of the International Refugee Organization in Europe between 1947–1951, on the example of its caring action towards Polish displaced persons and refugees. Moreover, the author will prepare a post-conference publication containing the materials of the workshop / conference with the participation of recognized researchers from Poland and from abroad, on the protection over the refugees and displaced persons in Europe in the first years after the Second World War. In this publication the contribution of the author of this project will be also included. Finally, during the realization of the project, the author will publish at least two articles in peer-reviewed journals, presenting selected aspects of the research results within the project.

The completion of the significant gap in the existing historiography seems to be a sufficient reason for examining the subject of the IRO’s activities towards Poles in the post-war Europe. The research on this topic becomes even more urgent in the context of today's debate on the status of refugees and the ways to solve the refugee problem in Europe. The IRO’s experiences in this matter seem to be very valuable and merit a competent and careful analysis.