

Economics, despite its history dating back some 250 years, is still a relatively young field of science that can contribute a great deal to a better understanding of the socio-economic functioning of the world. In a sense, it can be said to be 'imperial' in nature, as it touches on basically every aspect of our lives. This issue extends to health care, which, in the moment of an unfortunate accident or illness, can suddenly become central to our lives, even though we might previously have regarded it as something more abstract than real. Health care, therefore, is one of the key factors that has a long-term impact on social development and well-being. The constant search for ways to improve it has many positive and desirable effects, such as better accessibility to medical services, improved quality of treatment, increased life expectancy, more effective treatment of new and rare diseases, etc. Economics, as a science focusing on aspects of the management of rare goods in a changing and uncertain world, provides important intellectual support in this process by offering new solutions leading to a better understanding of the functioning of this part of the economy.

These issues also relate to the functioning of charitable institutions, which operate somewhat on the sidelines and create real support for those most in need in virtually every country in Europe and the world. It can be argued that charities operate between public and commercial solutions, which receive by far the most attention. Meanwhile, charitable institutions conceal unexplored potential that, if better understood, could have a significant impact on better meeting the health needs of societies. What seems particularly interesting here are considerable diversity and greater flexibility of their operation compared to mandatory public systems.

Consequently, there is a need to better explore the functioning of charitable institutions, which may lead, among other things, to support already existing arrangements (public and commercial) in meeting the health needs of the population. An important question that arises in this case is whether charitable institutions can be considered more as an indispensable part of it or just an 'add-on' to a more formal health care system.

It can be concluded that the scientific objective of the project is to *develop a research tool for multifaceted identification of the potential of charitable institutions to support public health care systems in European Union countries and to use it to identify opportunities to strengthen the importance of these institutions for improving access to medical services in Poland.*

In order to achieve the indicated objective, research will be carried out using a questionnaire sheet with representatives of charitable institutions. This will allow the development of a broad database for understanding the specific characteristics of charitable institutions in the indicated area, mechanisms of adaptation to change and interaction with the public and private sectors.

The results of the project may serve as a theoretical foundation for further research in, for example, optimising the allocation of private and public resources, reducing social inequalities, designing regulatory changes or financing policies for the non-profit sector in the area of health care. The results of the research can also be used to identify directions for in-depth pan-European research.