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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN UKRAINE: VECTORS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN WARTIME CONDITIONS

Abstract. *This article provides a comprehensive examination of the emergence and subsequent evolution of the contemporary paradigm governing inclusive education within Ukraine, specifically through the analytical lens of fulfilling international obligations amidst shifting global challenges. To achieve this, the authors have conducted an extensive and comparative analysis of various approaches and structural models of educational inclusion currently employed in prominent EU member states – namely Finland, Poland, Germany, and the Baltic states – juxtaposed against the Ukrainian experience. Furthermore, the study scrutinises the dynamics of both quantitative and qualitative indicators regarding the integration of Ukrainian schoolchildren with special educational needs (SEN) into the mainstream national education system throughout the period spanning 2017 to 2025. The complex processes involved in implementing the National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education are thoroughly analysed, as they serve as the indispensable foundation for achieving broader systemic change. Additionally, the article assesses the critical role played by the digitalisation of management processes, specifically through the deployment of the automated system for inclusive resource centres (AS IRC). This system is identified as a vital instrument for maintaining the resilience and continuity of the education sector during the mass population displacement triggered by the ongoing war. Ultimately, the research substantiates the necessity of deeper integration of effective digital solutions and the refinement of financial models, such as the "funds follow the child" mechanism, as fundamental factors for constructing a robust and transparent inclusive education system in Ukraine.*

Keywords: *inclusion, special educational needs, digitalisation of management, AS "IRC", accessibility, European integration, martial law, resilience of the education system.*

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1. Introduction. Ensuring equal access to quality education regardless of an individual's psychophysical devel-

opment is a fundamental principle of a democratic social order and a key requirement of the European Union's ac-

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quis communautaire. For Ukraine, in the context of full-scale military aggression, inclusive education takes on existential significance against the backdrop of a general demographic crisis caused by the war. Firstly, the number of children with special educational needs (SEN) is rising rapidly due to physical disabilities and psychological trauma (PTSD) sustained as a result of hostilities. Secondly, the number of children with SEN has increased due to the specific impact of the war; in particular, there has been a significant rise in the number of orphans, children from families facing severe hardship, street children, and so on. Thirdly, the European development agenda requires not merely declarative support for inclusion, but profound structural reforms in the social sector to harmonise national standards with European norms.

The harmonisation of national standards requires a definitive shift from the "medical model" (where great importance was attached to medical diagnosis) to the "social model" (*a needs-based approach*). In the latter case, the approach emphasises that it is not the child with SEN who is the barrier to the educational environment. On the contrary, the educational environment must be freed from barriers for children with SEN, ensuring their right to access quality education. Thus, the focus shifts to removing environmental barriers and creating an individual educational pathway for every learner.

Statement of the problem. There is significant social demand for progress in reforming the national education system, linked to the needs of Ukrainian society in wartime and the requirements of post-war reconstruction. This also applies to the development of an inclu-

sive educational environment as part of ensuring continuous and high-quality education for individuals with SEN amidst severe wartime challenges. Although the existing research base indicates a high level of theoretical exploration of this issue, the dynamic nature of educational reforms requires further academic study, a re-examination of classical concepts, and the practical adaptation of international strategies to the specific conditions of the Ukrainian educational landscape.

The aim of this article is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the content of inclusive education, its current state in Ukraine, to identify key challenges to its development on the path to European integration, and to substantiate strategic prospects for ensuring its compliance with European standards.

Literature review. The theoretical and methodological landscape of research into inclusive education at the present stage is characterised by multi-directionality and the interpenetration of classical pedagogical paradigms and the latest social and humanitarian strategies.

The concept of inclusion has been institutionally established by international documents such as the Salamanca Declaration and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006). In particular, the Salamanca Declaration formulated and enshrined the idea of a "school for all", which states that mainstream schools must be capable of educating all children, including those with SEN. Furthermore, in current academic and methodological discourse, inclusivity is regarded as a characteristic of "quality educa-

tion" rather than as an additional "social option". For example, the European Pillar of Social Rights explicitly proclaims everyone's right to quality and inclusive education, lifelong learning for participation in society, and a successful transition to the labour market [1].

These requirements are also taken into account at the national level. In particular, the Law of Ukraine "On Education" [2] enshrines the right to education without restrictions on grounds such as health status or disability (the principle of non-discrimination), and the state's obligation to create the necessary conditions for the education of persons with SEN, and to identify and remove barriers to the realisation of their rights.

In the academic works of Ukrainian scholars, the philosophical principles of national inclusive education have been thoroughly developed. In particular, I. Ziazun and V. Kremen, in their works, define a human-centred vector for the development of the education system, whilst inclusion is viewed as an ethical necessity. The conceptual understanding of a humanistic educational environment is complemented by the work of I. Bekh and S. Sysoieva, and J. Gibson, who interpret the educational space as an inclusive ecosystem.

Methodological approaches and issues relating to integrated education for children with special educational needs, as well as an analysis of the practical activities of inclusive resource centres (IRCs), are covered in detail in the works of V. Gladush, S. Kulbida, L. Prokhorenko, O. Chebotariova, V. Pank, V. Shevchenko and L. Danilenko. Key principles regarding the education and socialisation of individuals with SEN are also substantiated in the seminal works of V. Zasenka and T. Sak.

The conclusions of domestic authors largely correlate with the international research of T. Lorman and J. Lupart. The experience of foreign scholars (M. Forest, M. Giangreco, E. Lusthaus, J. Pearpoint and J. Putnam) makes a significant contribution to the development of an inclusive culture; their research has laid the foundation for understanding inclusion as a process of transforming the entire school community, rather than just individual inclusive classes.

Methods and data collection. *The information basis* for this article comprises Ukrainian legislation, data from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, statistical data from the State Scientific Institution "Institute of Educational Analytics", and other publicly available sources. The methodological basis of the study is *a systemic approach*, within which inclusion is viewed as a holistic ecosystem with a wide range of interrelationships between staff training, funding, the state of the material and technical base etc., and the ultimate success of the integration of learners into society.

A range of general and specialised research methods were employed during the study.

Content analysis was applied to review the academic literature and regulatory framework with the aim of systematising the key concepts, principles and models of inclusion operating in Ukraine and EU countries.

The comparative legal method was used to study and adapt best international legal practices for ensuring an inclusive educational environment.

The historical method and the problem-chronological method were applied to trace the evolution of inclusive education in Ukraine, identify the stages of its

reform, and systematically highlight the dynamics of overcoming existing challenges.

The methods of induction and deduction were used to identify links between the components of the analysis of individual cases and theoretical generalisations.

The forecasting method was used to formulate prospects for the further development of inclusive education and to develop practical recommendations based on identified current trends.

2. Research findings. In this study, we will examine the meaning of the term "inclusive education". In the modern sense, the term "inclusive education" first appeared in the Salamanca Declaration on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education [3]. In contemporary scientific and methodological discourse, UNESCO offers one of the most widely used definitions: "inclusion is the process of responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing their participation in learning, cultures and communities, and by reducing and eliminating exclusion". This is important from a methodological perspective: inclusion is interpreted not as a "state" (the existence of an inclusive class), but as ongoing administrative and pedagogical work to involve children in education and remove barriers for them. This document defines the basic principles of the educational policies of the signatory countries; in particular, it emphasises the importance of providing equal opportunities for all children "regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other condition, and of creating conditions for them based on pedagogical methods tailored to children's needs". Ukraine must strictly adhere to these key features and

principles of inclusive education within the framework of the current European integration process.

There are a number of features of international experience in the development of inclusive education. A study of global models [4] demonstrates somewhat differing approaches to the education of children with SEN, yet provides grounds for considering **Finland** a universally recognised leader in the field of inclusive education. Its experience serves as a model to be emulated, particularly in terms of the quality and systematic nature of support for inclusion.

The Finnish model of inclusion minimises segregation through proactive early identification of needs and the implementation of a three-tier support system directly within mainstream education settings. It comprises: General Support in the form of immediate assistance from the teacher in the classroom; Intensified Support, focusing on regular, flexible assistance for children with SEN from a special needs teacher and/or teaching assistant, which is not limited to the classroom; Special Support, which involves highly individualised learning in inclusive classes or small special groups (in some cases, in special schools for children with complex, multiple disabilities). This approach ensures that every child receives the resources necessary for their learning, whilst maintaining the integrity of the school environment.

It should be emphasised that the effectiveness of modern inclusion in Finland is based on the synergy between a personalised approach and professional teamwork. Individual education plans (IEPs) are developed for each learner, while the active use of pair or group

learning formats ensures that every pupil with SEN has opportunities for personal growth in real-life situations. A leading role in this process is played by highly qualified special needs teachers holding master's degrees, who combine direct support with coaching for colleagues; however, true accessibility is achieved through the joint efforts of the entire school community – from tutors to the administration. The state provides comprehensive support for inclusive education, including funding not only for special services (compensatory individual aids and necessary equipment) and, where required, necessary support (assistants, sign language interpreters), but also partial general support within the classroom.

Poland's model of inclusive education [5] is based on the "dual approach" principle, which combines the deep integration of persons with SEN into the mainstream education system with the operation of an extensive network of special schools. Education is organised across three types of schools: mainstream (1–2 children with SEN per class), inclusive (up to 5 children with SEN) and specialised classes. The choice of educational pathway is coordinated through specialised psychological and pedagogical advisory centres. The system's effectiveness is guaranteed by the involvement of highly qualified specialists with relevant training and an effective "funds follow the child" funding mechanism, where the amount of state subsidies for a school increases from two to nine depending on the complexity of the diagnosis and the pupil's individual "weighting coefficient". The Polish model places particular emphasis on high standards of training for support staff, in particular tutors – qualified

teachers with specialist training who act as professional teaching assistants and provide expert-level individual support within an inclusive environment. A key feature of the Polish model of inclusion is the synergy between all participants in the educational process – from the administration and teachers to parents and psychologists – which forms a holistic ecosystem of support for the child.

Lithuania's model of inclusive education [6] is built on a clear *three-tiered vertical structure* of psychological and pedagogical support, covering the school level, local education authorities and the National Centre for Education and Psychology of Persons with SEN. Thanks to the implementation of strategic state programmes, the Lithuanian system has almost fully integrated inclusive principles into mainstream schools, reserving specialised and sanatorium-based institutions only for exceptional cases. Comprehensive support (educational, medical and social) at national and regional levels is provided to children and parents from pre-school age onwards, drawing on the methodological framework of six national resource centres. The financial sustainability of the system is ensured by combining stable state budgeting with the active mobilisation of investments from the European Union's Structural Funds, which enables the implementation of innovative projects and the improvement of the material and technical infrastructure for inclusion.

Latvia's model of inclusive education [7] in pre-school and general education settings is based on the principles of freedom of choice and enhanced resource support for persons with SEN, through a special educational programme tailored to their health, abili-

ties and level of development. Parents of children with SEN have the right to choose their child's educational pathway: learning in a mainstream class, in a special class within a mainstream school, or in a specialised institution. The latter fulfill an important social mission, providing not only education but also full boarding for children with complex disabilities or from low-income families in rural areas. Methodological support and practical assistance for teachers and communities are provided by a two-tier network comprising the National Centre for Education and eight regional support centres. The economic sustainability of the system is guaranteed by a government mechanism of differentiated funding: for a child's education under a special programme, the state allocates funding equivalent to twice the standard amount provided for a pupil in mainstream education.

The **Estonian** model [8] of education policy is based on the priority of inclusion and deeply personalised learning, where a transition to specialised institutions (covering only 2.1% of persons) occurs only if a child's potential cannot be realised in mainstream schools. A key instrument of the system is the work of an external multidisciplinary advisory group, which assigns enhanced or special support based on a comprehensive diagnostic cycle: ranging from pedagogical and psychological assessments and long-term behavioural observations to medical and speech therapy evaluations. The stability of this model is guaranteed by centralised state funding, which provides the necessary resources to adapt the educational environment to the individual needs of each pupil.

The **German** model of inclusive education [9] is characterised by a unique

complexity, stemming from the deep federalisation and autonomy of the 16 federal states (*Länder*), each of which independently formulates its own funding strategy and support mechanisms for persons with SEN. The historical foundation of the system is an extensive network of specialised schools (*Förderschulen*), which provide highly qualified support in three key areas: learning support (*Lernen*), emotional and social development (*Emotionale und Soziale Entwicklung*) and intellectual development (*Geistige Entwicklung*). Despite the UN Convention's requirements for full inclusion, modern Germany is transforming these institutions into powerful resource centres that not only educate children but also act as expert hubs, providing professional advice to mainstream school teachers for the effective integration of persons into the general education environment.

Thus, the European transformation of the education system between 2008 and 2025 has, on the whole, shaped the modern, holistic European social paradigm of inclusion, moving away from the outdated medical model, where the education of children with disabilities was viewed merely as "treatment" in isolated boarding schools. The basis for this transition was *the needs-based approach*, which shifts the focus from medical diagnosis to providing the necessary support for each child. Overall, this was an evolutionary path that unfolded through several successive stages: from *the complete exclusion* and *segregation* of persons with SEN in separate institutions to their *integration* and, ultimately, to full *inclusion* within the educational ecosystem, where it is not the child who must adapt to existing conditions, but the education system

itself that flexibly adapts to the pupil's individual characteristics, guaranteeing them barrier-free access to quality education.

Inclusive education in Ukraine also has a history of its own; it has undergone a complex and dynamic process of development and encompasses two strategic phases: the period of fundamental (legislative and infrastructural) reforms in this area of education (2017–2021) and the period of testing its resilience under martial law (2022–2025). The legislative framework introduced in 2017 [10] marked the start of practical reforms in education for children with SEN, the overcoming of psychological barriers and the improvement of the quality of their education. It not only broke the monopoly of boarding schools, granted children with SEN the right to study at any institution, and legitimised distance and individual forms

of education, but also laid the foundations for the development of systematic psychological and pedagogical support for such children.

A systematic analysis of the dynamics and state of education for children with SEN in Ukraine (2017–2025) was carried out based on available statistical data from the State Scientific Institution "Institute of Educational Analytics" [11]. It demonstrates a number of trends and identifies problems in inclusive education. During the period 2017–2025 in Ukraine (Fig. 1), a gradual transition from segregation to inclusion became characteristic of the education of children with SEN, as evidenced by a decrease in both the number of special general secondary schools (including those with boarding facilities) and the total number of persons attending them.

As of the beginning of the 2024/2025 academic year, the network of special

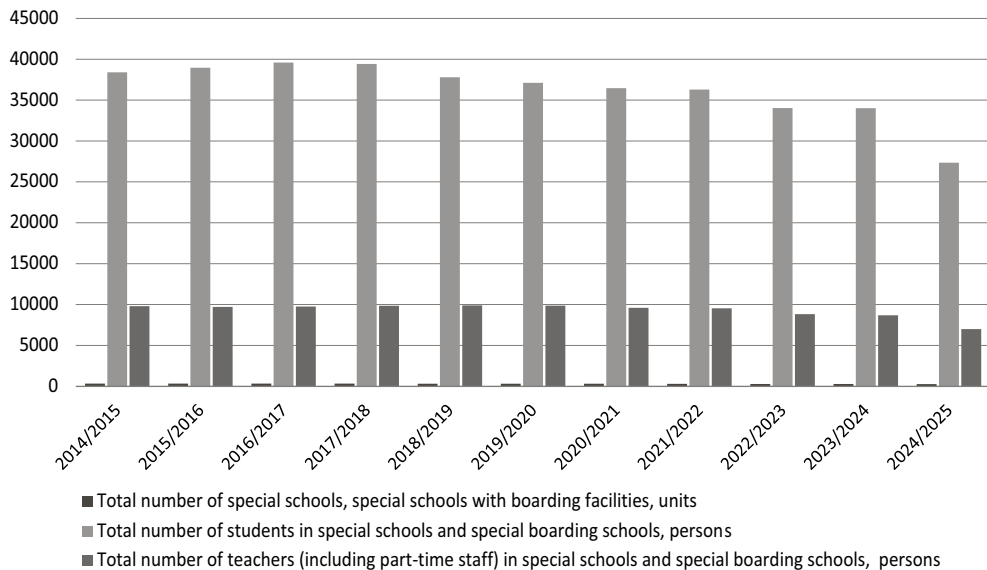


Fig. 1. Trends in education indicators for children with SEN in special secondary schools for the period 2014–2025

Compiled from the source: SSI "Institute of Educational Analytics". (n. d.). *Analytics*. Retrieved from <https://iea.gov.ua/en/main-activities/scientific-and-analytics-activities/analytics/>.

secondary schools in Ukraine (including those with boarding facilities), comprises 278 institutions. In the context of a full-scale invasion, these institutions have undergone a significant transformation: they are no longer merely educational centres, but have become safety hubs and shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Statistical data indicate a steady downward trend in the number of persons with special educational needs: the total number of persons receiving education in special secondary schools decreased by 12,248 compared to the 2016/2017 academic year, standing at 27,348 in the 2024/2025 academic year. 27,348 persons, distributed by form of education and accommodation as follows: 34.4% (9,415 persons) – studying and living in boarding schools; 21.7% (5,933 persons) – special classes; 36.0% (9,855 persons) – educational support. The sharpest decline in figures was recorded during the period of martial law (2022–2025), during which the number of persons in special general secondary schools fell by 8,946, accounting for over 70% of the total reduction over the last nine years.

Among the reasons for this downward trend, it is worth noting the forced displacement within the country and abroad caused by the war. Around 485 children with special educational needs, including 286 orphans and children deprived of parental care, were forcibly relocated, along with staff from the institutions, to boarding schools in the Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi and Chernivtsi regions following the outbreak of active hostilities. Some of the children who were receiving education in special institutions were relocated abroad. As of 1 August

2022, a total of 2,225 children with special educational needs had been evacuated from Ukraine, of whom 1,074 were orphans and children deprived of parental care, and 229 were children with disabilities. Between 2022 and 2025, the scale of children with SEN leaving the country doubled: as of 1 April 2025, the total number of persons with SEN who remained outside Ukraine stood at 4,597.

At the same time, during the period under review, Ukraine witnessed active inclusion processes within mainstream schools, reflecting a practical and systemic rethinking of educational approaches [12].

Analysis of verified data (Fig. 2) indicates the active scaling up of inclusive education: in the 2024/2025 academic year, education for children with SEN is organised in 7,624 general secondary education institutions, which is five times higher than the figure for the 2016/2017 academic year. As of 2025, there are over 33,900 inclusive classes operating in Ukraine, which is 12.5 times higher than in 2016. The number of persons with SEN receiving education exclusively in inclusive classes in general secondary education institutions in the 2024/2025 academic year reached 47,300, which is 11.3 times more than in the 2016/2017 academic year and indicates a shift in public opinion and increased parental confidence in mainstream schools. Overall, 62,900 children in Ukraine were enrolled in various forms of inclusive education by the start of 2025.

Such large-scale integration objectively expands the pool of potential participants in the EIT/NMT among graduates with SEN. The lack of publicly available data on the academic

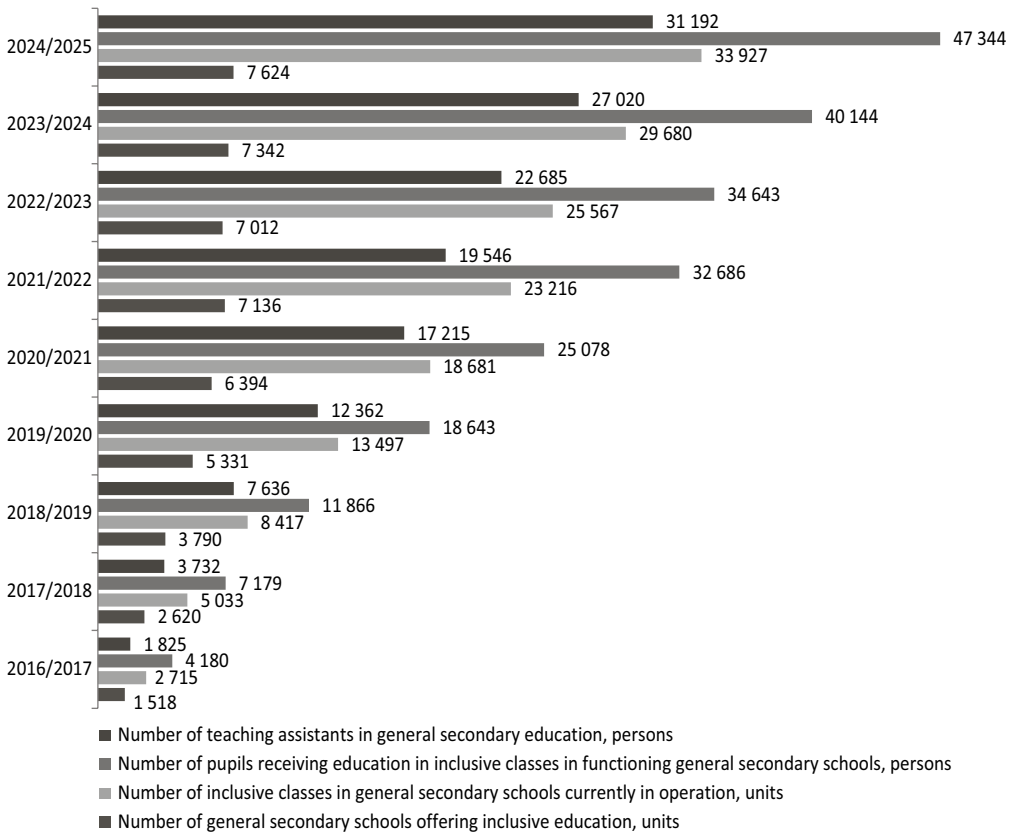


Fig. 2. Trends in inclusive education indicators in Ukraine during the 2016/2017–2024/2025 academic years

Compiled from the source: SSI "Institute of Educational Analytics". (n. d.). *Analytics*. Retrieved from <https://iea.gov.ua/en/main-activities/scientific-and-analytics-activities/analytics/>.

results of children with SEN over the last five years makes it impossible to directly analyse the dynamics of the success rates of graduates in this category and to fully assess the quality of inclusive education. The available official statistics are largely limited to organisational aspects (providing special arrangements during testing) and general indicators of participation (coverage) in education for children with SEN, which allows only a formal assessment of the accessibility of education. At the same time, the actual level of academic achievement of graduates in this cate-

gory at the final assessment stage remains outside the scope of systematic monitoring.

The establishment of the IRCs marked an innovative step in the field of inclusive education. This signalled a practical reform of the system for assessing special educational needs, within the framework of which psychological, medical and educational consultations were reorganised into a geographically accessible, unified network of IRCs [13]. These centres became a one-stop shop for comprehensive psychological and pedagogical assessment of develop-

ment and for remedial and developmental services for children with SEN.

Since 2022, the role of the IRCs has undergone a significant evolution with a substantial expansion of their remit: in addition to standard diagnostics, specialists have focused on developing recommendations for the organisation of the educational environment, providing psychological support and rehabilitation for children with psychological trauma from the war, and creating a safe educational environment. With the outbreak of the war, CMU Resolution [14] introduced additional tasks for Regional Educational Centres (RECs) regarding the conduct of comprehensive (including re-evaluation) assessments and systematic support for individuals with SEN who have been forced to relocate and have been enrolled in inclusive classes, but do not receive services, or are studying remotely but do not receive remedial-developmental or psychological-pedagogical services. One of the key tasks of the IRC during the war period has been the optimisation of regulatory, legal and technological support, in particular by minimising bureaucratic barriers and simplifying procedures for accessing services, which allows the system to remain effective and child-centred even in the most difficult times.

The use of modern digital tools and specialised applications has enabled specialists to provide the remedial and developmental component of education without being tied to the child's geographical location. This radical transformation is driven, first and foremost, by the need to ensure the continuity of inclusive education whilst adapting to security challenges and mass population displacement. This approach not only guarantees the availability of spe-

cialised support but also demonstrates the digital transformation of the inclusive sector as a response to the extreme challenges of the modern world, which significantly contributes to enhancing the resilience of the national education system as a whole [15].

The practical experience of the IRC's operation during the war has confirmed the high viability of distance service delivery models, which, under the current conditions of martial law, undoubtedly remain an important and, in some cases, the only form of education for children with special needs. The correctness of choosing precisely this strategy for the education of children with SEN is confirmed by the dynamics of the functioning of the IRCs: between 2018 and 2025 the number of IRCs established in Ukraine increased by a factor of 1.4, reaching 723 units in 2025 (Fig. 3).

Amid the war, 678 IRCs continue to operate and ensure the fulfilment of key tasks within their remit. The premises of 45 IRCs have been destroyed or damaged and cannot currently be used for their intended purpose. A total of 47 IRCs are located in the temporarily occupied territory (Donetsk – 8, Zaporizhzhia – 22, Luhansk – 9, Kherson – 8).

Further digitalisation is a key component in ensuring the success of inclusive education. The effectiveness of the current inclusive model in Ukraine is based on continuous and transparent interaction between the family, the educational institution and relevant specialists. As noted, the AS IRC portal [16] has become a key practical tool for such communication, transforming complex bureaucratic procedures into a convenient digital service. The AS IRC portal provides a full life-cycle of support for children with SEN: from

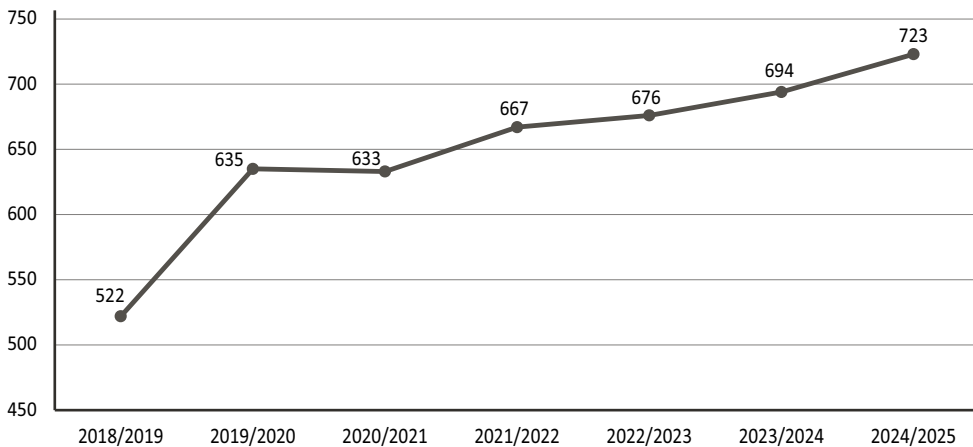


Fig. 3. Trends in the number of IRCs in Ukraine from the 2018/2019 academic year to the 2024/2025 academic year

Compiled from the source: SSI "Institute of Educational Analytics". (n. d.). *Analytics*. Retrieved from <https://iea.gov.ua/en/main-activities/scientific-and-analytics-activities/analytics/>.

an intelligent geolocation search for the nearest centre to remote document management in a personal account. The portal has become particularly significant for IDPs, offering adaptive mechanisms for simplified registration and emergency developmental assessment. The AS IRC has become not merely a technical upgrade, but a shift in management philosophy. In particular, this information system made it possible to verify data, identify the actual need for teaching assistants and optimise the allocation of subsidies. Thanks to cloud-based data storage, over 15,000 IDP children were able to resume their education in new locations without having to undergo lengthy assessments again, as their comprehensive assessment reports were accessible to IRC specialists in any region of Ukraine. As of February 2026, a total of 574,906 applications for services had been submitted to the IRCs, and the centres' specialists had produced 559,114 reports on the condition

of children with SEN. Such management decisions contribute to adherence to the key principles of modern inclusive education: person-centred learning and upbringing, a humane attitude towards children with special needs and their socialisation; the creation of comfortable conditions for a child's learning and upbringing, the fostering of a tolerant attitude among parents, teachers and persons towards children with special educational needs, the overcoming of psychological barriers and the improvement of the quality of their education.

Overall, the active development of inclusive education has been accompanied by quantitative and qualitative changes in the composition of teaching staff in schools. Between 2017 and 2025, the number of teaching assistants (*see* Fig. 2) working with children with SEN increased 17.1-fold, reaching 31,192 in 2025. The total number of teaching staff (speech therapists, special needs teachers, rehabilitation teachers,

and educational psychologists) working within the IRC system and providing the remedial and developmental component of education stood at 4,030 as of 1 April 2025. Despite this progress, staffing needs remain pressing and have not been fully met.

Systemic challenges of domestic inclusion. Despite significant progress in the regulatory framework, digitalisation, an increase in staff caring for children with SEN, the creation of new financial instruments (a special grant for inclusive education), etc., ensuring the right to quality education for all children – including those with SEN, IDPs and children who have suffered psychological trauma – in the context of full-scale military aggression still faces a number of systemic challenges. These challenges hinder the full integration of Ukraine's education system into the European educational area.

1. **Infrastructure and logistical challenges.** The physical inaccessibility of a significant part of the educational environment today is caused both by the direct destruction of educational institutions' infrastructure as a result of attacks, their location near the line of contact or in temporarily occupied territories, and by obsolescence or non-compliance with state building regulations, which do not meet modern universal design requirements. In addition to damage, the lack of inclusive shelters has become a critical problem. The absence of lifts, the non-compliance of ramps with standards, and the inaccessibility of specialised rooms (laboratories, sports halls) on upper floors make learning physically impossible for children in wheelchairs. According to official data from the State Scientific Institution "Institute of Educational Analytics",

in the 2024/2025 academic year, out of 12,013 functioning general secondary schools (excluding special schools), unimpeded access for persons with disabilities to the ground floor is provided in 9,342 schools, which accounts for 78% of the total number of such institutions in Ukraine. Access to the second floor is possible in 110 schools (0.9%), to the third floor in 93 schools (0.8%), and to the fourth floor and above in only 36 institutions (0.3%). The figures for the provision of special educational facilities in terms of specific adaptations at entrances and within premises to ensure barrier-free access for persons with special educational needs are as follows: ramps and handrails are installed in 7,811 schools (65.0% of the total number of functioning schools), lifts (lifts) – 307 educational establishments (2.5%), specially equipped toilet facilities for people with disabilities – in 1,777 schools (14.8%), and resource rooms – 3,552 schools (29.6%). And although a slight positive trend has been recorded across many indicators since 2023, this issue remains an urgent priority for resolution, as accessibility and barrier-free access in the context of full-scale war and during the reconstruction period must be a priority when making any management decisions and changes in education [17].

Furthermore, there is a pressing issue regarding the inadequate provision of specialised resources and digital teaching tools for individuals with special educational needs. In particular, there is a shortage of modern remedial equipment, teaching materials and technologies adapted to various conditions, as well as high-quality and functional sensory rooms, which are a key tool for helping children to relax and for remedi-

al work. As of the start of the 2024/2025 academic year, the provision of schools in Ukraine with auxiliary equipment for teaching children with SEN is as follows: general remedial equipment – 2,971 schools, or 24.7% of all functioning general secondary schools; equipment for speech therapy for persons with special educational needs, including those with severe speech impairments – 1,273 schools (10.6%); for persons with sensory impairments (including those with visual impairments and blind persons) – 252 schools (2.1%); for individuals with musculoskeletal disorders and those with complex disability profiles – 954 schools (7.9%); for physical education lessons, remedial sessions in therapeutic physical education and rhythmic – 1,871 schools (15.6%); for a psychological rehabilitation room – 924 schools (7.7%) and for a resource room – 3,077 schools (25.6%). Means for adapting play activities for children with SEN of various ages and with different psychophysical developmental impairments are available in 1,445 schools, accounting for 12.0% of all functioning general secondary schools. Only 1,194 schools (9.9%) of operating general secondary schools are equipped with corrective teaching aids for individuals with severe speech impairments, musculoskeletal disorders and intellectual disabilities, including those with autism spectrum disorders, whilst 187 schools (1.6%) are equipped with special educational resources for blind and visually impaired persons.

There is also a *logistical barrier* for children with special educational needs attending mainstream schools. In the 2024/2025 academic year, transport to school was arranged for 4,784 persons with special educational needs living more than 2 km from their school.

A total of 418 special buses were deployed to transport children in wheelchairs; however, the current additional need for such vehicles (a shortage of specialised transport) stands at over 291 units, effectively preventing some children from reaching their place of education.

Under martial law, the total volume of state funding for inclusive education has significantly decreased. Whilst the volume of state subsidies for the needs of people with special educational needs, in particular for psychological, pedagogical, and remedial-developmental sessions, grew steadily between 2017 and 2021 (from 98.3 to 504.5 million UAH), for the period 2022–2025 this figure has fallen by a factor of 1.7 and in 2025 stood at 304.6 million UAH (only 18% of the actual need, estimated at 1.68 billion UAH).

2. Staffing challenge. There is a shortage of qualified specialists (teaching assistants, special needs teachers, psychologists, speech therapists), as well as a low level of readiness among "generalist" teachers to work in inclusive classes. For example, despite the position of teaching assistant being enshrined in law, its practical implementation faces challenges: from uncertainty regarding the role's remit and a lack of quality training to teachers' psychological unpreparedness for teamwork. As of 1 April 2025, staffing levels for teaching staff at the IRC (speech therapists, special needs teachers, rehabilitation teachers, and practical psychologists) stand at 78.9%, whilst staffing levels at general secondary schools for practical psychologists and social pedagogues stand at 82.9%. Among the main causes of staff shortages, it is worth noting low motivation (low pay) and the unclear

social status of these posts, which lead to high staff turnover.

3. **A methodological challenge.** Modern education faces a significant methodological challenge: the transformation of formal "integration" into meaningful inclusion. Today, teachers face a shortage of effective tools ranging from adapting teaching content and ensuring remedial support in lessons to creating special conditions during the National Assessment of Secondary Education (NASE) and External Independent Testing (EIT). The most critical problem remains the risk of "physical presence without engagement" – where, due to a mismatch between teaching methods and individual abilities, a child with special educational needs finds themselves excluded from the active educational process. Overcoming this challenge requires a systematic review of the mechanisms for developing individual educational pathways, the implementation of universal design in teaching, and the continuous professional development of teachers.

4. **A socio-mental challenge** caused by the persistence of social stereotypes, prejudices and fears regarding the joint education of persons alongside children with SEN. There also remain, to some extent, issues of bullying and an insufficient level of inclusive culture among all participants in the educational process (parents, persons, school management), which creates an emotionally hostile environment for children with SEN.

5. **Challenges associated with the war.** The prolonged, full-scale military aggression has not only worsened the situation of persons who already had special educational needs, but has also

significantly increased their overall numbers due to the physical and psychological trauma suffered by previously healthy children: between September 2021 and October 2023 alone, the total number of persons with SEN increased by 23,834 to over 104,722. This negative trend requires the immediate expansion of the psychological and pedagogical support system, as a huge number of children with severe psychological trauma and PTSD, who do not formally have a disability, also require special educational conditions and psychological support.

An analysis of the state of inclusive education in Ukraine and current challenges defines the key vectors of modernisation and the vision for the post-war restoration of the inclusive education system in Ukraine.

The following areas can be identified as **strategic priorities for the development of inclusive education in Ukraine.**

Vector 1. Digital ecosystem and smart technologies. The development of *an adaptive digital environment (AI-driven learning design, digital assistive technologies, smart content and interactivity)* envisages the evolution of the "IRC" system into a highly effective intelligent platform, where technologies function not as an additional barrier, but as an "amplifier" of the child's capabilities, helping teachers create personalised development pathways. The development of adaptive textbooks and teaching materials that automatically adjust the format of presentation (text to speech, language simplification, visualisation) depending on the pupil's cognitive or physical needs, and the transition to new-generation gadgets and specialised software, guarantee

barrier-free communication access to complex educational content, even for children with complex developmental disorders.

Vector 2. Financial sustainability and European standards. The introduction of a flexible funding system, for example based on Poland's experience, involves a transition to a model where the amount of funding depends not on the formal presence of a diagnosis, but on the actual complexity and intensity of the support required, through the application of a nosological coefficient. This can ensure targeted support, where funds are directed directly towards specific services and resources (the "funds follow the child" principle) in accordance with persons' needs, guaranteeing the fairest and most effective allocation of budgetary resources. Full alignment of the national regulatory framework with European Union directives and the standards of the *European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education*, along with a shift to *outcome-based auditing*, will make Ukrainian education for children with SEN understandable and recognised worldwide.

Vector 3. Infrastructure renovation based on the "Build Back Better" principle. Creating an inclusive ecosystem involves not merely restoring the damaged education network to its previous state, but legislatively enshrining Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and transitioning from standard buildings to next-generation infrastructure. The introduction of mandatory Universal Design standards in education when designing new facilities and renovating existing ones guarantees not only physical but also cognitive accessibility. A creative and barrier-free space with multifunctional zones adapted to the

needs of children with various types of disabilities, meeting high EU safety and ergonomic standards (from sensory rooms to active zones), not only minimise stress and aid concentration, but also stimulate motivation to explore the world and learn.

Vector 4: Human capital and psychological resilience. *Developing a new generation of specialists capable of working in the face of complex challenges* requires educators to demonstrate professional readiness and mental well-being. The transformation of the IRCs into leading expert hubs primarily involves expanding the remit of specialists, who must be proficient in methods for dealing with combat trauma, PTSD and the effects of stress, thereby providing qualified support in crisis situations. Strategic capacity development involves launching a comprehensive incentive system for teachers and assistants, combining financial incentives with career opportunities, as well as large-scale global partnerships through the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes for knowledge transfer and specialist placements at leading European institutions.

Vector 5. Sociocultural transformation and the humanisation of society. Inclusion must transcend the narrow confines of "educational services" and become a fundamental social value that determines the quality of human interaction and the level of democracy within the state. The implementation of educational programmes for parents and educators does not merely shift the focus from "stereotypes" to the "value of diversity", but also contributes to the formation of an inclusive culture.

Cultivating the principles of tolerance, solidarity and active empathy must form the basis for creating an eco-

system of support and acceptance – that is, an environment where children with SEN are perceived as full participants in social life, with real and equal opportunities for full self-realisation.

Conclusions. The development of a modern inclusive environment is not only a humanitarian duty but also a key indicator of Ukraine's readiness for integration into the European educational space.

An analysis of the current state and prospects for the development of inclusive education in Ukraine leads to the conclusion that Ukraine has successfully overcome the stage of institutional establishment of inclusive education, and the legislative framework that has been formed provides the necessary foundation. However, the transformation of quantitative indicators into qualitative outcomes is currently still hampered by the war and resource constraints, and the success of the reforms depends on overcoming the inertia of public consciousness and moving from declarative to real accessibility of education for children with SEN.

It has been found that the full-scale war has brought the issue of methodological flexibility and the need to ensure accessibility for people with special educational needs to the fore. The main challenges regarding inclusion include the lack of infrastructure in safe environments (shelters) and staff shortages, particularly in rural areas.

A key factor in the sustainability of inclusive education as a component of the national education system in the context of a humanitarian crisis is the creation of inclusive online tools that take into account the specific needs of children with SEN in distance learning and ensure their psychological resilience in stressful conditions.

The need to transition to a "flexible inclusion" model has been substantiated; this involves adapting the system to the individual pace and needs of the pupil, transforming the role of the teacher (from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of a personalised educational pathway), and expanding the cohort of children with SEN to include other groups of children affected by the war.

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ІНКЛЮЗИВНА ОСВІТА В УКРАЇНІ: ВЕКТОРИ ЄВРОІНТЕГРАЦІЇ В УМОВАХ ВОЄННОГО ЧАСУ

Анотація. Авторами статті виконано комплексне дослідження особливостей становлення та можливостей подальшого розвитку сучасної парадигми інклюзивної освіти в Україні крізь аналітичну призму виконання міжнародних зобов'язань і врахування умов постійних глобальних викликів. Проведено розширений аналіз підходів і структурних моделей освітньої інклюзії, які наразі застосовуються в провідних країнах ЄС, зокрема у Фінляндії, Польщі, Німеччині, країнах Балтії, у порівнянні з українським досвідом. У цьому контексті оцінено виклики та можливі ускладнення в ході впровадження Національної стратегії розвитку інклюзивної освіти як бази системних змін. Досліджено динаміку кількісних і якісних показників інтеграції українських школярів з особливими освітніми потребами в загальну національну систему освіти протягом 2017–2025 рр. Особливу увагу приділено ролі цифровізації управлінських процесів у сфері інклюзивної освіти, проаналізовано переваги впровадження автоматизованої системи роботи інклюзивно-ресурсних центрів (АС «ІРЦ»), яка стала важливим інструментом забезпечення стійкості та безперервності освітнього процесу в умовах масового переміщення учнів, їхніх батьків, учителів, спричиненого війною. Обґрунтовано необхідність подальшого поглиблення інтеграції ефективних цифрових рішень для освітнього управління, удосконалення фінансових моделей підтримки процесів в інклюзивній освіті, зокрема впровадження програми «гроші ходять за дитиною», програм підвищення кваліфікації вчителів, що сприятиме підвищенню стійкості та прозорості системи інклюзивної освіти в Україні, а також наближенню її до обов'язкових євроінтеграційних вимог.

Ключові слова: інклюзія, особливі освітні потреби, цифровізація управління, АС «ІРЦ», доступність, європейська інтеграція, воєнний стан, стійкість освітньої системи.

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