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## CHALLENGES OF WAR FOR UKRAINE'S WELFARE POLICIES

### ВИКЛИКИ ВІЙНИ ДЛЯ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ УКРАЇНИ

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**Introduction.** In the past, Ukrainian welfare policy followed a post-Soviet approach that relied heavily on cash benefits. Gradually, with the support of international partners, the management and values of the social support system began to change. However, the Russo-Ukrainian War profoundly disrupted Ukraine's welfare system, revealing its inadequacies in dealing with the new complexities [9].

This paper examines how the armed conflict has exacerbated pre-existing problems and led to the creation of new social measures to support

vulnerable populations. It examines government initiatives, emergency responses at the local level and international cooperation aimed at mitigating the impact of the war on social services.

**Key Results.** The outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian armed conflict in 2014, following the annexation of Crimea and portions of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, presented unprecedented challenges to the welfare policies Ukraine. This conflict gave rise to new demographic groups, such as IDPs, requiring the relocation of social institutions from the occupied territories and the provision of assistance to ex-combatants and their families [6]. These developments emphasized the sector's imperative to adapt to new emerging social issues.

As of January 1, 2020, the implementation of the Law "On Social Services" in Ukraine introduced fresh obligations for local governmental bodies and introduced a community-based model for social services. This law aims to improve the management of the social services system as part of decentralization efforts, streamline spending and standardize organizational methods [2]. It mandates local municipalities to provide a range of basic social services. Although state and local authorities have made significant efforts to address the challenges in the social service sector by early 2022, these initiatives were interrupted by the full-scale war, resulting in incomplete implementation of decentralization [7].

The COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2024 and the ongoing armed conflict have created new challenges for the country's demographic, social and economic well-being.

More than 30% of Ukraine's working-age population has been displaced inside and outside the country, and over 1 million men and women of working age have been employed in the security and defense sectors. This situation has disrupted social ties within Ukrainian families and contributed to a deterioration in the mental and physical health of Ukrainians. In addition, cases of domestic and gender-based violence have increased and the number of people with functional impairments and disabilities has risen. The destruction of social infrastructure and the exodus of labor further exacerbate these problems [1; 8; 9].

The initial lack of preparation significantly exacerbated the challenges faced by social workers at the beginning of the armed conflict [3]. These challenges required a reassessment of approaches to providing social support to Ukrainians. Innovative strategies have already been developed in response to the crisis [1; 4; 5; 8].

In order to accommodate displaced persons or those affected by the consequences of the war, basic emergency services were initially expanded.

In addition, access restrictions and means testing were temporarily lifted to ensure wider coverage of assistance.

New initiatives targeting IDPs, war veterans and their families were launched. These programs included various forms of assistance, including psychosocial support, economic opportunities and social reintegration assistance. The programs were mainly implemented as grassroots initiatives with the support of international organizations and donors.

Secondly, the process of digitalization of public services was accelerated, which made it easier for those affected to access state aid. It was possible to apply for social benefits remotely.

In addition, new trauma-informed information and therapy approaches such as Hibuki therapy for traumatized children and initiatives such as "Together. Meeting Points" (supported by UNICEF) played a crucial role in providing comprehensive support to displaced children, young people and families.

The government has presented numerous key initiatives [8; 9], among which the transition from cash payments to the development of universal social assistance instruments stands out as a priority. This transition includes the establishment of an efficient system of social and rehabilitation services and investment in social protection. In addition, the introduction of the 'money follows the customer' model aims to improve flexibility and responsiveness in the delivery of services. New forms of support, such as upskilling, retraining and assistance to start a new business, are integral parts of this transition and reflect a comprehensive approach to meeting social welfare needs in times of crisis.

To support these initiatives, the establishment of a digital registry is crucial to enable efficient management, transparency and accessibility of social services. This initiative is part of the government's efforts to digitally transform social services and aims to create a unified information system for the social sector.

One of the most important initiatives is the introduction of community resilience centers that provide comprehensive psychosocial support to vulnerable individuals, families and groups facing difficult circumstances. This approach relies on using local knowledge and relationships to provide culturally relevant support tailored to the specific needs of the community.

The current welfare policy pays particular attention to ex-combatants. The Social Recovery and Adaptation for the Veterans' Community program aims to support military personnel and their families in their transition to civilian life through high quality social services. This includes the deployment of social workers in healthcare facilities to support wounded

military personnel during their recovery. In addition, the revised National Strategy for Creating Barrier-Free Environments aims to incorporate new standards of inclusion, particularly for people with disabilities, due to the context of war.

In times of war, "A Family for Every Child: Developing Family Adoption" is an important policy change. This initiative will streamline the adoption process and systematically address the needs of children, particularly those affected by conflict and returning from institutions to their biological families. By aligning with international standards for alternative care, the importance of ensuring a stable and supportive family environment is emphasised, especially amidst the challenges caused by the armed conflict and occupation.

These measures reflect Ukraine's commitment to improving and expanding the effectiveness of welfare policies in response to the ongoing armed conflict and underscore the country's determination to ensure resilience and responsiveness in the face of profound war-induced challenges.

**Conclusions.** The Russo-Ukrainian War has led to substantial adaptations in Ukraine's social welfare system, straining it with increased demands. Despite these challenges, the government's commitment to supporting vulnerable populations through policy measures is evident. Initiatives like transitioning to universal social assistance tools and establishing Resilience Centers demonstrate efforts to enhance welfare policies during crises. Looking ahead, prioritizing vulnerable populations, fostering collaboration, and leveraging international support are crucial for strengthening Ukraine's social welfare infrastructure. By building upon the progress made and remaining adaptive to evolving circumstances, Ukraine can better withstand the impacts of the ongoing armed conflict and promote greater social resilience and cohesive welfare policies.

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