EDUCATION DURING THE WAR: CHALLENGES FOR UKRAINE

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SUMMARY

The article deals with the problems in the field of education in Ukraine related to the Russian aggression on February 24, 2022. Statistical data are given regarding casualties among the population, damage to infrastructure, migration and budget cuts. In particular, changes in terms of financial resources, redistribution of funds and the need to ensure the safety of participants in the educational process are analyzed. Attention is paid to the role of international cooperation, support for Ukrainian educational institutions by European partners through academic mobility programs, and free online learning opportunities. In this context, conclusions are drawn regarding the prospects for solving urgent problems in the field of education and the necessary preconditions for achieving this goal.

Keywords: *education, education institution, education process, war, martial law.*

The early morning of February 24, 2022 will forever remain in the memory of every Ukrainian. Just a few minutes after the announcement of so-called "special military operation", missile and air strikes began throughout the territory of Ukraine, including in the major cities of Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Kherson, Chernihiv and others. These events shocked the entire civilized world reminding the horrors of the World War II, which the current generation knew only from books, movies and the stories of their older relatives.

Since February 24, when Russia attacked Ukraine, at least 8,000 civilians have died, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The UN emphasizes that these figures are only verified and documented deaths, and that the real death toll is much higher [7].

Russian aggression caused the largest wave of refugees since the World War II. In general, according to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, during the year of the war, out of more than 8 million Ukrainians who left for Europe, almost 5 million registered in the EU temporary protection system. Most of the Ukrainian refugees were accepted by Poland, where more than 1.5 million Ukrainians received the status of temporary protection. More than 1 million Ukrainian citizens settled up in Germany, of which almost 900,000 received temporary protection in this country. The Czech Republic is in third place in terms of the number of Ukrainian refugees accepted, with almost half a million temporary protection certificates. According to a UN survey, 85% of Ukrainian refugees are women. 47% are between 35 and 59 years old, another quarter are between 18 and 34 years old. 47% of them have higher education diplomas and 73% of them had been working before the war started [7].

A lot of Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes remaining in Ukraine. The Ministry of Reintegration of Ukraine states that the number of internally displaced persons is 4.87 million people. 57 billion UAH was spent on housing assistance for such people from the state budget in 2022. 800,000 internally displaced people already plan to stay where they are, and will not return to their homes (which may simply no longer exist) [7].

The infrastructure suffers significant destruction every day. The Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine reported that as of the beginning of 2023, "about 123,000 residential buildings" have been partially or completely destroyed throughout Ukraine. Approximately 70% of all destruction occurs in frontline regions [8].

The military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine became a challenge to the very existence of our state, its sovereignty. The above facts naturally had a huge impact on education as well.

The major challenges for the field of education are:

1. Threat to life and health of participants in the educational process, limiting access to basic human needs.

2. Large-scale destruction of the educational infrastructure: damage to the premises of educational institutions, the educational material and technical base, educational and production practice bases.

3. Forced large-scale relocation of participants in the educational process within Ukraine and abroad, which led to significant losses of the contingent of education seekers, pedagogic and teaching staff.

4. Exacerbation of the problem of ensuring access to education for Ukrainian schoolchildren and students, violation of the continuity of the educational process.

5. Loss of managerial educational control in the territories temporarily occupied or in the zone of active military operations. Forcible reorientation of Ukrainian education seekers to Russian curricula, textbooks, forced transition to the Russian language of instruction.

6. Reduction of state and local budget expenditures on education.

7. Ensuring the development of private education at the levels of preschool, general secondary and out-of-school education [4].

The main irreparable loss is human casualties. 494 children were killed, more than 974 were injured, 16226 illegally deported. This data does not include information from areas where the active hostilities take place [9].

Significant destruction of infrastructure also affects the educational process. 3180 education institutions have suffered bombing and shelling. 450 educational institutions have been destroyed completely. 73 youth centers have been destroyed or occupied [9].

Educational process participants also face many other difficulties. Travelling within Ukraine is not safe anymore. A lot of teachers and researchers lost their jobs or have difficulties in their professional activities. The same goes for students. Some universities were relocated. In this case, part of the documentation could be lost or destroyed. Every day Ukrainian youth, students and staff instead of enjoying life, studying and teaching hide in bomb shelters, endure everyday inconveniences or defend Ukraine fighting in

the ranks of the armed forces.

Despite all the above problems, the Ukrainian education system survived having demonstrated strong solidarity among institutions.

Education process restarted on 14 March, 2022 in distance or blended learning formats. 24 regions of Ukraine are providing distance learning education.12 are working in blended format – online and offline. 34 higher education institutions, 65 universities' affiliated units and 44 professional pre-higher educational institutions were displaced. Educational institutions and youth centers in Ukraine have become humanitarian aid hubs. Schools, vocational education training and higher education institutions have redesigned and shared their campuses to serve as shelters for the internally relocated people in parallel with educational process [9].

A large number of higher education institutions were moved to other regions. Thus, during the period from 2014 to the present time due to the war and aggression on the part of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, 134 institutions of higher, professional pre-higher education and their separate structural subdivisions were relocated, which is 11.7% of their total number in the country [4].

All of them have to continue working online, while Europe went offline immediately after the lifting of quarantine restrictions related to COVID-19. During the pandemic, Ukraine faced serious problems with online learning, the main ones being technical challenges. Effective online learning is possible under conditions of availability of a technological device, such as a computer, tablet or smartphone, and access to high-speed Internet connection. Even in peace time providing students with high-speed Internet remained problematic in some areas. In addition, not every student had a personal electronic device, especially when several family members had to work online at the same time.

In wartime, there were challenges of a different nature. In the conditions of constant shelling in the front-line territories, the need to stay in shelters, many participants in the educational process could not work productively.

Even in the regions relatively far from the war zone, online learning faced significant challenges. In the period from November 2022 to February 2023, the aggressor regularly subjected energy infrastructure to targeted missile attacks. As a result, entire regions of Ukraine were deprived of electricity and communication for a long period: several hours, and sometimes several days. It was impossible to conduct a full-fledged educational process in such conditions.

It was predicted that financial difficulties arose. According to data from the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE), as of January 2023, the total amount of direct documented damage caused to the infrastructure of Ukraine due to the Russian invasion was estimated at $137.8 billion.

According to preliminary estimates of the Ministry of Economy for 2022, Ukrainian GDP decreased by more than 30%. On the one hand, this is less than Ukraine and its international partners predicted at the beginning of the war. On the other hand, this is the deepest and most rapid decline in the 30 years of Ukraine's independence. For comparison: Ukraine finished the last pre-war year, 2021, with a growth of 3.2% [7].

International financial aid became the source of covering the lack of funds in the

Ukrainian budget. It comes in the form of both grants and loans. According to the Ministry of Finance, from the beginning of the Russian invasion until the end of 2022, the amount of international financial aid exceeded 32 billion dollars. 45% of this amount was grant money, given to Ukraine without the need to return it. Since the beginning of 2023, another 4.7 billion dollars have already arrived from international partners [7].

The deficit of the state budget in 2023 will amount to more than 20% of GDP. GDP growth is expected at the level of 3.2% [10].

For obvious reasons, the funding of many areas is being reduced. Priority is given to the army and the defense sector. In the state budget of Ukraine for 2023, UAH 122.12 billion were allocated for education, which is 20% less than last year. Almost all development programs have been reduced, it is about repairs, construction and purchase of equipment.

In addition to the traditional cost items for teachers' salaries, scholarships for students, textbooks, training and the like, new ones have appeared related to the current situation. The state focused on the safety of schoolchildren, students and teaching staff. Therefore, for the first time, the state budget provides funds for reliable and properly equipped shelters. A safe environment had to be created in all institutions. UAH 1.5 billion has been earmarked for the provision of more than 300 shelters and safe conditions in institutions of general secondary education. 1 billion was dedicated for school buses (since a lot of school transport was sent for the needs of the army) [2].

It should also be noted that, despite the wartime, the volume of the state order in quantitative terms remained, and even exceeded last year's indicator by 0.14% [4].

In general, the educators will have to tighten their belts. The final salary of school teachers and university lecturers will be lower due to the reduction of additional payments and bonuses. Considering the very different financial capacity of territorial communities and the different effectiveness of the educational network, it can be expected that in some cities and villages the situation with funds for education might be quite critical.

The financial component was problematic even before the war. The financing of higher education has systemic flaws, so it remains ineffective, and institutions constantly feel a lack of funds to ensure functioning and, above all, for development, which requires the implementation of urgent measures to find radically new mechanisms for attracting resources in the higher education system (permanent funds (endowments), co-financing, public-private partnership, etc.). The inefficiency and costliness of the network of higher education institutions remain a restraining factor for ensuring the competitiveness of higher education, which are exacerbated by the existing limitations of the financial autonomy of higher education institutions [6].

In this difficult situation, it is important that Ukrainian universities continue to carry out international cooperation.

International partners provide support at individual, institutional, national and international levels. Students and staff who are temporary abroad receive various help and assistance. Many international projects are aimed at supporting Ukrainian education.

So, the project "For academic freedom and networking in Europe" was aimed at supporting scientific and pedagogical staff who found themselves in difficult condi-

tions [1]. Their educational institutions were damaged as a result of hostilities, and they themselves lost their jobs. Thanks to the support of the project, a course of lectures was held for Ukrainian and German students in certain disciplines. A number of non-governmental organizations from Germany and other countries participated in the financing of these events. The continuation of the project, the organization of scientific and communicative events with the participation of Ukrainian and German scientists is planned for 2023.

On March 9, 2023, the European Commission revised the Annual Work Program of the European Union for Education, Training, Youth and Sports Erasmus+ for 2023. The total program budget for this year has been revised upwards to a new total of €4.43 billion, the highest annual financial package ever achieved by the Erasmus+ Programme. Additional funding will support beneficiary organizations of the Erasmus+ Program, which focus attention on involving forcibly displaced citizens of Ukraine in their activities. Such activities may cover language and cultural integration courses as well as general financial support in all Erasmus+ sectors for learners and teachers [11].

The war causes numerous obstacles for the effective implementation of international academic projects. A lot of activities are not possible, or possible with delay, Ukrainian universities cannot act as a host in the implementation of academic mobility, many universities in Ukraine continue to work online, while their foreign partners have long returned to offline education.

During martial law the male students and staff 18-60 years old are not allowed to cross the border with some exceptions. University students are exempt from mobilization for the study period. However, it does not provide automatic permission for the border crossing. The final decision is taken by the Border Control Officer based on the provided documents [9].

In spite of everything, the academic mobility of teachers is implemented. In particular, in 2023 Odesa State Agrarian University (OSAU) implemented 2 academic mobility programs under agreements with European partners. The results are disseminated among the University academic community in order to develop further international exchanges [3].

Besides this the opportunities for training at international platforms are used. OSAU joined the projects "OPENSPACES" and "DILLUGIS" (Digital Labs & Lectures for Ukrainian, German & International Students). The goal of the projects is to support Ukrainian students and researchers giving them the possibilities to join the distance courses of European institutions, which were specially adapted for the Ukrainians. The online courses are free of charge and end with receiving certificates of international academic mobility for those who have successfully completed the course [5].

Summing up, it should be noted that even despite the incredible difficulties related to the war, most Ukrainian educational institutions have continued their work. More and more schools and universities are moving to an offline form of education. The admission campaign to higher educational institutions continues. The strategy for the development of education for the period up to 2032 was approved. At the same time the cessation of Russian aggression, the liberation of the occupied territories and the establishment of long-term and just peace in Ukraine is the primary condition for a comprehensive and successful solution of problems in the field of education.

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