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## **INCLUSION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN GERMANY**

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Today, in the context of the war in Ukraine, more and more Ukrainian refugees are seeking refuge in European countries, and a significant number of Ukrainians are temporarily staying in Germany. As of April 2023, 205,000 children and young people from Ukraine are integrated into the German education system. A particular challenge is the inclusion of children with special educational needs in Germany and all over Europe. This article analyzes the current situation and main challenges related to the integration of Ukrainians in Germany.

The purpose of the article is to explore the main difficulties associated with the inclusion of children with special needs in the German education system.

For coping with this huge and complicated problem, we should develop some strategies for teachers and parents to make them understand the causes of the main difficulties; also we should give them instruments to improve current situation and minimize maladaptation in the future. The first step for all these purposes is to analyze the near future: explore the main challenges for Ukrainian refugees in the German education system and analyze the prospects for efficient inclusion of this group of students into German education institutions.

In the course of the study, based on the results of a survey of parents of children with special needs, the main challenges for children with special needs and their parents when integrating into German society were recognized. They are conditions of chronic stress, language barrier, and difficulties with integration into peer groups. As for the school environment, the main problems are the lack of Ukrainian-speaking teachers and insufficient attention of the teaching staff to the processes of socialization, integration and behavioral characteristics of children. Strengthening special support for children in the educational environment is also desirable.

The processes of comprehensive integration of Ukrainian refugees into both educational and social environments require further study, because most of the problems faced by children with disabilities and their parents in Germany are also characteristic of the wider refugee population from Ukraine in Europe.

*Keywords:* Ukrainian refugees, inclusion, children with special needs, German education system.

According to the current geopolitical situation there are a lot of new refugees in Europe because of the war in Ukraine. This is the newest challenge in the modern history. According to the Ministry of Education, by mid-May 2022, about 11,000 students who had fled from Ukraine were admitted to schools in Lower Saxony (NDR, 2022). By the beginning of September, 172.787 children and youth from Ukraine were admitted to general education and vocational schools in Germany (Das Deutsche Schulportal, 2022) in April 2023 this figure reached 205.000 students.

The process of integration of these people into the European society is different in comparison to integrations of previous waves of fugitives. Ukrainian refugees are European people with specific culture, history and traditions and the intensity of escaping is extremely high. That is why the problem of efficiency of integration and psycho-pedagogical support of the newest Ukrainian refugees is not developed much on the scientific and practical levels.

The starting point for refugee schoolchildren from Ukraine is very difficult. The learning deficit compared to German schoolchildren has probably increased due to the war and emigration. It remains unclear how long-term integration efforts should be, but the current situation in Ukraine and the already massive destruction of educational institutions and resources suggests that a quick return to everyday Ukrainian school life will not be possible (Ifo-Institut, 2022).

Inclusion entails the right of all learners to quality education and the development of their full potential, regardless of special educational needs, disability, sex, social or economical backgrounds. In particular, the practice of learning and teaching must be adapted to the needs of all, and diversity must be used as a resource. Inclusive education is integrated into German law on the basis of international law (German Commission for UNESCO, 2022).

The inclusion of Ukrainian children, both with special and without special educational needs into the German educational system has especial challenges. The research on and the implementation of inclusive education must consider the complexity inherent in the circular pattern of causal factors in the field of education (Werning, 2014).

**The purpose** of the article is to explore the main difficulties in the inclusion of children with special needs in the German educational system

The educational system in Ukraine has its own peculiarities, the structure of the educational process is different in Ukraine on the level of organization of the education, programs, and legislation, that is because Ukraine has the heritage from the former Soviet educational system, an impossibility of enough free and flexible planning. One of the problems of inclusive education is the establishment of relationships between children with psycho-physical disabilities and peers with

typical development in the inclusive class (Siniov, Fert, 2021). From the other side, due to the reforms in the sphere of the educational policy there are positive changes in the organization of inclusive education during the last decade. One of the most difficult aspects of this problem is finding ways and means to overcome obstacles in the student's interaction with the class. The work of many scientists is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of mutual relations in the team (Vettese, Dyer, Li, Wekerle, 2011). Furthermore, Ukrainian refugees are psychologically traumatized, many of them were witnesses of military actions, also, they have stress because of the different social environment and difficulties associated with a language barrier. Positive relationships are also an important part of successful interventions targeting social-emotional behaviors at school (Taal, Ekels, van der Valk, van der Molen, 2017). It is important to avoid physical and mental health impairment caused by stress (Sørli, Hagen, Nordahl, 2020).

In this context very important is to explore the main challenges and causes of them for Ukrainian refugees in the German educational system on psychological, social, and educational levels, because these spheres are very closely related: to analyze the prospective of the efficient inclusion of Ukrainian refugee students into the German educational system.

**Method.** In our research we used the method of Face-to-face interviews: synchronous communication of time and place. Due to this synchronous communication, as no other interview method FtF interviews can take its advantage of social cues. Social cues, such as voice, intonation, body language etc. of the interviewee can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee on a question (Opdenakker, 2006). Also we used the two section questionnaire to recognize the main general needs in inclusion of children with disabilities and psychological and academic needs of children.

**Participants.** The most complex problem is the integration of children with special needs into the German educational system. We found out the main difficulties faced by parents of children with disabilities when moving to Germany. For this purpose, we surveyed a group of parents of 3–6 years children with neurodevelopmental disorders – autism spectrum disorders, intellectual and behavioral disorders (12 respondents). All the children attend kindergartens and schools in Germany, Lower Saxony.

#### **Data Collection Tool**

- The following questions were asked during the interview:
  1. How do you evaluate your psychological state?
  2. What main difficulties of adaptation do you and your child experience?
  3. How does the process of socialization of the child go on in the conditions of the educational environment?
  4. Is there enough correctional support for the child in the educational environment and outside of school hours?

- Questionary for the parents consisted of two sections and 8 indicators.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

- Based on the analysis of respondents' answers during FtF interviews, the following was identified:

1. Parents of children with special needs suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and it is chronic. This is connected with the fact that all of them have experienced war related events, more than half of the respondents witnessed military actions or fled from the occupied territories.

2. Also the very process of raising a child with a disability is associated with chronic stress due to difficulties in accepting the situation, as these are parents of young children, they are still in a state of acceptance of the very problem of difference between their children and peers.

3. Additional stress is associated with moving to another country and issues of integration in the new place. People are looking for their place in the labor market, trying to get used to the new rules.

4. The problem is also that German teachers, who do not know the Ukrainian language, work with children, and it is difficult for children to adapt to the new conditions.

5. The process of socialization in the conditions of the children's collective is also very difficult, it is difficult for children to communicate with their peers, because of the language barrier.

Below in (table) the results obtained from parents' questionnaire are presented. The findings of the study demonstrated that parents agreed that lack of Ukrainian speaking teachers and educators is an obstacle for appropriate inclusion (100 %) this is decreasing the children's academic and psychological state achievements.

The results have also shown that a great proportion of the participants (93,33 %) thinks that teachers should note the importance of socialization, communication and language, and behavioral needs for children in the classroom.

*Table*

The results of parents questionnaire

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
<b>Axis 1: Challenges for inclusion of children with special needs.</b>			
1. Children with learning disabilities should study in special classes under the supervision of a psychologist.	53,33 %	43,66 %	00 %
2. Children demonstrate qualitative differences in social interaction and often have difficulty in establishing relationships.	95,66 %	05,33 %	00 %
3. Deficits in communication and language usage are seen at varied levels.	80 %	05,33 %	16,66 %
4. Lack of Ukrainian speaking teachers and educators is an obstacle for appropriate inclusion.	100 %	00 %	00 %

<b>Axis 2: Psychological and academic needs of children.</b>			
5. Social skill development is essential for children.	77 %	14,66 %	08,33 %
6. Effective approach for children with special needs should include comprehensive communication assessment and intervention.	66,66 %	16,66 %	16,66 %
7. Much care and attention should be given by special teachers.	91,66 %	00 %	08,33 %
8. Teachers and educators should note the importance of socialization, communication and language, and behavioral needs for children in the classroom.	93,33 %	0,33 %	07,33 %

### Conclusions

It goes without saying, that each refugee is an object of inclusion in the present circumstances. The psychological well-being of refugee children is also low compared to other children living in Germany (Ifo-institute, 2022). Especially the process of inclusion is difficult for children and the most difficult for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

For coping with this huge and complicated problem, we should develop some strategies for teachers and parents to make them understand the reasons of the main difficulties, also we should give them instruments to improve current situation and minimize inadaptation in the future, The first step for all these purposes is analyzing the nearest prospective. exploring the main challenges for Ukrainian refugees in the German educational system and analyze the prospective of efficient inclusion these group of children into German educational institutions.

In conclusion, the main challenges for children with special needs and their parents when integrating into German society are conditions of chronic stress, language barriers, and difficulties with integration into peer groups. As for the school environment, the main challenges are the lack of Ukrainian-speaking teachers and insufficient attention of the teaching staff to the processes of socialization, integration and behavioral characteristics of children. Strengthening special support for children in the educational environment is also desirable.

The processes of comprehensive integration of Ukrainian refugees into both educational and social environments require further study, most of the problems faced by children with disabilities and their parents are also characteristic of the wider refugee population from Ukraine in Europe.

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## ІНКЛЮЗІЯ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ДІТЕЙ З ОСОБЛИВИМИ ПОТРЕБАМИ У НІМЕЧЧИНІ

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Сьогодні в умовах війни в Україні все більше українських біженців знаходять прихисток у країнах Європи, значна кількість українців тимчасово перебуває у Німеччині. За даними на квітень 2023 р., 205 тис. дітей та молоді з України

інтегрують у німецьку систему освіти. Особливим викликом є інклюзія дітей з особливими освітніми потребами у Німеччині та в інших країнах Європи. У статті проаналізовано актуальний стан та основні виклики, пов'язані з інтеграцією українців у Німеччині.

Для того, щоб впоратися з цією величезною і складною проблемою, ми повинні розробити певні стратегії для вчителів і батьків, щоб допомогти їм зрозуміти причини основних труднощів, а також дати їм інструменти для поліпшення поточної ситуації і мінімізації дезадаптації у майбутньому. Першим кроком для всіх цих цілей є аналіз найближчої перспективи, дослідження головних проблем українських біженців у німецькій освітній системі та аналіз перспектив ефективного включення цієї групи дітей до німецьких освітніх установ.

Мета статті – дослідити основні труднощі в інклюзії дітей з особливими потребами в німецькій системі освіти.

Під час дослідження (за результатами опитування батьків дітей з особливими потребами) було виявлено, що основними викликами для дітей та їхніх батьків при інтеграції в німецьке суспільство є умови хронічного стресу, мовний бар'єр та труднощі з інтеграцією в групі однолітків. Що стосується шкільного середовища, то головними проблемами є брак україномовних учителів та недостатня увага педагогічного колективу до процесів соціалізації, інтеграції та поведінкових особливостей дітей. Також бажаним є посилення спеціальної підтримки дітей у освітньому середовищі.

Подальшого вивчення потребують процеси комплексної інтеграції українських біженців як в освітнє, так і в соціальне середовище, оскільки більшість проблем, з якими стикаються діти з інвалідністю та їхні батьки у Німеччині, характерні й для ширшого контингенту біженців з України у Європі.

*Ключові слова:* українські біженці, інклюзія, діти з особливими потребами, німецька система освіти.