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SOCIAL PROTECTION OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN UKRAINE: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION

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Abstract. This article examines the current state and key directions for improving the system of social protection for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine. The study analyzes contemporary scholarly approaches to understanding the social protection of IDPs and assesses the impact of the full-scale war on the scale of internal displacement as well as on the functioning of state and non-state support mechanisms.

Particular attention is paid to institutional, socio-economic, and legal challenges, as well as to the role of international organizations and civil society in supporting displaced populations. Based on an analysis of recent academic research and practical experiences, the paper substantiates the main directions for improving the social protection system for IDPs in order to enhance its effectiveness, resilience, and long-term integration orientation.

Keywords: internally displaced persons, social protection, social policy, war, Ukraine, social integration

The issue of internal displacement represents one of the most acute social challenges facing contemporary Ukraine. Since 2014, and especially following the full-scale invasion in 2022, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reached unprecedented levels, posing complex challenges for the state in the field of social protection and social policy. According to assessments by international organizations, Ukraine is among the European countries with the largest population of internally displaced persons, which significantly intensifies the need for a systematic revision and improvement of existing support mechanisms.

Internal displacement has become one of the most severe social and economic problems confronting Ukraine in the context of armed conflict and prolonged instability. As of early 2026, approximately 3.712 million internally displaced persons were officially registered in Ukraine, meaning individuals who were forced to leave their homes within the country due to military aggression and who continue to retain IDP status. This figure is based on data collected and synthesized by international humanitarian organizations, particularly the International Organization for Migration (IOM) within the framework of the Displacement Tracking Matrix [1]. At the same time, around 4.7 million people have returned to their places of origin, indicating the highly dynamic and fluid nature of population mobility. The largest flows of IDPs are concentrated in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, and Donetsk regions [2]. These movements are driven not only by active hostilities but also by economic and social factors that compel individuals to seek safer living and employment opportunities. Consequently, internal displacement has become a structural factor affecting national stability and development, as it requires continuous adaptation of infrastructure, resources, and public policy. Studying internal displacement and identifying effective solutions to support IDPs therefore constitutes a critical step toward mitigating the long-term consequences of the crisis.

In contemporary academic literature, the social protection of IDPs is examined within the framework of welfare state theory, the concept of social vulnerability, and human-rights-based approaches. Researchers emphasize that internally displaced persons face heightened social risks due to the loss of housing, employment, social networks, and access to established support mechanisms [3–7]. From this perspective, displacement is not merely a spatial relocation but a profound social rupture that undermines economic security, psychological well-being, and social inclusion.

International approaches developed under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stress the necessity of combining humanitarian assistance

with long-term integration strategies [8]. In this context, social protection for IDPs is conceptualized not as a temporary emergency response but as an integral component of sustainable social development aimed at restoring autonomy, resilience, and active participation of displaced persons in host communities.

The Ukrainian system of social protection for IDPs was formed under conditions of emergency and significant resource constraints. Initial regulatory and legal acts addressing the needs of internally displaced persons were predominantly compensatory in nature and focused primarily on cash assistance. Over time, the system underwent partial evolution; however, recent academic studies indicate the persistence of several structural deficiencies.

First, social protection for IDPs in Ukraine remained fragmented for a prolonged period, with a predominance of short-term support programs. An analysis of regulatory frameworks demonstrates that until recent years, social protection measures for IDPs consisted of disparate, reactive, and largely temporary interventions aimed at mitigating immediate consequences of displacement rather than ensuring long-term socio-economic integration. This fragmentation highlighted the urgent need to transition toward a comprehensive social policy model oriented toward durable solutions and integration into host communities.

Second, access to social services has largely depended on the region of residence and the institutional capacity of local communities. Large urban and financially stable municipalities were able to develop extensive networks of social institutions, foster cross-sectoral partnerships with civil society and international organizations, and implement innovative and digital service delivery models. In contrast, rural, economically disadvantaged, and frontline communities faced severe limitations due to staff shortages, damaged or overloaded infrastructure, and insufficient funding. As a result, regional disparities and uneven local governance capacity contributed to significant inequality in access to social services and the quality of assistance provided.

Third, a substantial proportion of IDPs experienced a state of social dependency, which hindered their integration into new communities. This dependency emerged from the interaction of economic, administrative, and socio-psychological factors. For an extended period, the primary form of support remained monthly state subsistence assistance, which, in the absence of effective employment mechanisms, fostered prolonged financial reliance. Social benefits and privileges were rigidly linked to IDP status, creating fears of losing eligibility in the event of formal employment or relocation and thus restricting mobility. Limited access to the labor market – caused by lost documentation, disrupted professional networks, and insufficient retraining programs – further reinforced reliance on social assistance as the main income source. Additionally, housing insecurity associated with prolonged residence in temporary accommodations and the psychological consequences of forced displacement contributed to social passivity and reduced civic participation. Collectively, these factors indicate that social dependency among IDPs was not an individual shortcoming but rather the result of a predominantly compensatory social policy model focused on short-term relief instead of sustainable integration.

The full-scale war has exacerbated these challenges. On the one hand, the state was compelled to respond rapidly to a dramatic increase in the number of IDPs; on the other hand, existing institutional mechanisms became overwhelmed. In this context, international and non-governmental organizations assumed a crucial role in delivering social protection and humanitarian assistance.

Recent academic research emphasizes that improving the social protection system for IDPs requires a comprehensive approach [7]. This involves shifting from predominantly cash-based support toward integrated programs combining social, economic, and psychological components. Housing policy constitutes a particularly important dimension, requiring a transition from temporary accommodation solutions to long-term housing provision strategies.

Equally important is strengthening the role of local communities in implementing social programs. Decentralization offers opportunities for more flexible responses to IDP needs but necessitates adequate financial and human resources. The literature also underscores the importance of labor market integration as a key condition for social independence and reduced pressure on the social protection system.

Social protection of IDPs is a central priority of state social policy, as this group faces exceptionally difficult living conditions that demand comprehensive and long-term solutions. Military actions, occupation, and infrastructure destruction have forced millions to leave their homes, resulting in the loss of housing, employment, and stable income. IDPs represent one of the most vulnerable population groups, facing significant obstacles in adapting to new socio-economic environments amid economic instability, housing shortages, and limited employment opportunities. Ensuring adequate social protection for IDPs encompasses several core dimensions: financial assistance, housing provision, employment facilitation, access to healthcare and education, as well as legal and psychological support. Since the onset of armed conflict, the Ukrainian government has implemented various programs, including one-time cash payments, compensation for lost property, housing subsidies, and social integration initiatives. However, despite considerable efforts, the issue remains acute and requires further refinement. One notable trend is the strengthening of legal integration of IDPs into the country's social and economic framework. Legislative reforms aim to guarantee equal access to social services, pensions, and state financial assistance. Simplified procedures for obtaining benefits, improved labor market access, and expanded support programs reflect gradual progress in this direction.

Housing provision remains a critical challenge. Given the scale of displacement, the state has introduced innovative solutions, including social housing construction, rental subsidies, housing purchase assistance, and compensation mechanisms for destroyed property. Modular settlements and temporary housing projects have been implemented in several regions, offering minimum living conditions until permanent solutions are achieved.

Local-level integration is another essential dimension, encompassing employment opportunities, vocational retraining, and social adaptation. Local authorities, in cooperation with international partners, organize professional training programs, skills

development courses, and job creation initiatives. To support economic self-sufficiency, the state has expanded concessional lending and grant programs for IDP entrepreneurship. International assistance plays a vital role in supporting IDPs. Cooperation with organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Red Cross provides funding for social programs, humanitarian aid, and capacity-building initiatives for public servants. This collaboration enhances living conditions for IDPs and strengthens social infrastructure in host regions.

Based on research findings and expert recommendations, a set of policy measures is proposed (Table 1).

One of the key aspects of system improvement is enhancing state assistance mechanisms through automation and differentiation of benefits. Digitalization reduces bureaucracy and ensures continuity of support.

Table 1 Key directions of social protection for idps during wartime and the post-war period

Area of Improvement	Recommended Measures
Improvement of state support and social benefits	Automation of benefit allocation; differentiated payments based on vulnerability; simplified access through digital platforms
Housing provision and infrastructure access	Affordable housing programs; development of social infrastructure; financial support for host communities
Employment stimulation and economic integration	Employment and retraining programs; tax incentives and financial support for IDP entrepreneurs; investment attraction
Social integration and psychological support	Psychological assistance programs; integration centers in communities; educational support for IDP children
Legislative improvement and rights protection	Expansion of legal guarantees; monitoring mechanisms; involvement of international organizations

Effective information support is equally critical for adaptation and integration. Lack of accessible information increases social tension and hampers adjustment. Recommendations for improving information support are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Recommendations for Improving Information Support for IDPs

Area	Recommendations
Unified information platform	Creation of a national portal with access via mobile apps and hotlines
Multichannel communication	Enhanced hotlines, social media use, printed materials
Information and educational campaigns	Webinars, legal and psychological consultations, digital literacy training
Community interaction	Regular meetings, consultation centers, peer exchange platforms
Countering disinformation	Monitoring fake news, awareness campaigns, media literacy training

Effective information support accelerates adaptation, reduces social tension, and promotes integration. Utilizing digital technologies, multichannel communication, and partnerships with local authorities and international organizations is essential.

The conducted analysis demonstrates that the system of social protection for internally displaced persons in Ukraine has undergone significant transformations in

response to large-scale and prolonged displacement caused by military aggression. At the same time, the study confirms that the current model of social protection remains largely reactive and compensatory in nature, focusing primarily on mitigating immediate social risks rather than ensuring sustainable social and economic integration of IDPs into host communities.

The findings indicate that social protection of internally displaced persons should be conceptualized as a multidimensional and long-term policy area that integrates social assistance, housing provision, employment support, psychological rehabilitation, and legal protection. The dominance of short-term financial assistance mechanisms, while critically important during emergency phases, has contributed to the formation of social dependency among a significant proportion of IDPs. This dependency, reinforced by administrative attachment of benefits to IDP status, limited labor market access, housing insecurity, and psychological consequences of forced displacement, has hindered full participation of displaced persons in community life and economic activities.

The research highlights pronounced regional disparities in access to social services, which are determined by the financial, institutional, and managerial capacities of local communities. Decentralization has created opportunities for more flexible and context-sensitive responses to the needs of IDPs; however, without adequate resource provision and professional support, these opportunities remain unevenly realized. As a result, inequality in access to social protection persists, undermining the principle of social justice and equal opportunities.

A crucial conclusion of the study is the growing importance of international organizations and civil society actors in complementing state efforts. Their involvement has not only ensured continuity of assistance during periods of institutional overload but has also introduced innovative practices, rights-based approaches, and integration-oriented models of support. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such cooperation depends on systematic coordination with national and local authorities and the incorporation of international standards into domestic social policy frameworks. The analysis also confirms that sustainable solutions for IDPs cannot be achieved without prioritizing labor market integration and housing stability. Employment and entrepreneurship support programs play a key role in restoring economic independence, reducing welfare dependency, and strengthening social cohesion. Similarly, the transition from temporary accommodation to long-term housing solutions is essential for enabling displaced persons to plan their future and invest in local communities.

Overall, the study substantiates the necessity of transitioning from an emergency-driven social protection model to a comprehensive, resilience-oriented system that emphasizes empowerment, inclusion, and long-term development. Such a system should be grounded in human rights principles, supported by evidence-based policymaking, and adapted to the realities of post-war recovery.

Further research should focus on several interrelated directions. First, there is a need for in-depth empirical studies examining the long-term socio-economic trajectories

of internally displaced persons, including employment stability, income dynamics, housing outcomes, and levels of social participation. Longitudinal research designs would allow for a better understanding of how different policy interventions influence integration outcomes over time. Second, future studies should analyze the effectiveness of specific social protection instruments, such as targeted cash assistance, employment subsidies, housing vouchers, and retraining programs, in reducing social dependency and promoting self-sufficiency among IDPs. Comparative analyses between regions and communities with varying levels of institutional capacity would provide valuable insights into best practices and scalable models. Third, greater attention should be paid to the psychological dimension of displacement and its interaction with social policy. Research into the impact of trauma, prolonged uncertainty, and loss of social capital on labor market behavior, civic engagement, and well-being of IDPs would contribute to the development of more holistic and trauma-informed support systems. Fourth, future research may explore the role of digitalization in enhancing access to social services and improving information support for IDPs. Evaluating digital platforms, e-governance tools, and multichannel communication strategies could inform more inclusive and user-centered service delivery models. Finally, comparative international research examining Ukraine's experience alongside other countries affected by large-scale internal displacement would allow for the identification of transferable policy lessons and the adaptation of global best practices to national contexts.

In sum, continued interdisciplinary research integrating social policy, economics, psychology, and public administration is essential for designing an effective, equitable, and sustainable system of social protection for internally displaced persons in Ukraine, particularly in the context of post-war recovery and long-term national development.

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ЕКОНОМІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ВПЛИВУ ГЕНДЕРНИХ СТЕРЕОТИПІВ НА ПРОФЕСІЙНУ САМОРЕАЛІЗАЦІЮ

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Розвиток професійної кар'єри є важливим чинником формування людського капіталу та підвищення конкурентоспроможності економіки. Водночас у сучасному суспільстві зберігається вплив гендерних стереотипів, які формують нерівні можливості доступу до професійного зростання, керівних посад та високого рівня доходів. Незважаючи на формальне закріплення принципів рівності, неформальні соціокультурні установки продовжують визначати очікування щодо ролей жінок і чоловіків у професійному середовищі.

У наукових дослідженнях гендерні стереотипи розглядаються як система узагальнених уявлень про «типові» характеристики та професійні ролі представників різної статі. Такі уявлення впливають на процеси професійного вибору, оцінювання компетентності, формування управлінського резерву та просування по службі. Зокрема, Василик А. В. у роботі [1] зазначає, що традиційні гендерні установки обмежують можливості професійної самореалізації жінок, особливо у сферах із високим рівнем відповідальності та управлінських функцій.

Проблема «скляної стелі» як прояву прихованої дискримінації залишається актуальною для українського ринку праці. Рекуненко І. І. [2] підкреслює, що навіть за наявності однакової кваліфікації жінки частіше стикаються з бар'єрами під час переходу на керівні посади. Подібні тенденції пов'язані не лише з інституційними обмеженнями, але й із домінуванням уявлень про «традиційний лідерський профіль», що історично асоціюється з чоловічими якостями.