

Milena Kravchenko

State University of Telecommunications, Kyiv, Ukraine

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4559-3033>

 milenaau@ukr.net

PUBLIC POLICY IN THE SPHERE OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL PROTECTION IN WAR CONDITIONS

POLITYKA PUBLICZNA W ZAKRESIE POMOCY SPOŁECZNEJ DZIECI W WARUNKACH WOJENNYCH

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Abstract:

Social protection of children in the conditions of a full-scale war on Ukraine's territory has become significantly more complicated and has given rise to a number of problems: to save the children's lives, to ensure their rights, to protect the most vulnerable, to meet the children's humanitarian needs such as, in particular, access to food, water and sanitation, psychosocial assistance, education, mine risk education, as well as the provision of services for children with special needs, etc. Russians often hide behind Ukrainian children as human shields and use them for their propaganda. This paper analyzes the state of current social protection of children and the acute problems associated with the inability to provide an adequate level of protection for children who are injured, victims of violence, abduction and illegal export of children to the territory of the aggressor country, children left without parental care, including for reasons and as a result of war and in need of adoption, as well as children with developmental disabilities who need early intervention services. Proposals for improving public policy in the social's protection sphere of children in war are proposed.

Keywords:

children's social protection, public policy, war

Abstrakt:

System pomocy społecznej dzieci w warunkach wojny w Ukrainie jest dość złożony, w szczególności pojawiło się wiele nowych wyzwań, które znacznie skomplikowały i stworzyły szereg problemów: ratowanie życia dzieci, zapewnienie ich praw, ochrona najsłabszych, zaspokojenie potrzeb humanitarnych dzieci, w tym dostępu do żywności, wody i urządzeń sanitarnych, pomocy psychospołecznej, edukacji, szkoleń z zakresu bezpieczeństwa górniczego, a także świadczenia usług na rzecz dzieci ze specjalnymi potrzebami itp. Rosjanie często używają ukraińskich dzieci jako żywych tarcz i wykorzystują je do swojej propagandy. W artykule dokonano analizy aktualnego stanu systemu pomocy społecznej dzieci oraz dotkliwych problemów związanych z brakiem możliwości zapewnienia odpowiedniego poziomu ochrony dzieciom, które doznały obrażeń, stały się ofiarami przemocy, uprowadzenia i nielegalnego wywozu na terytorium państwa agresora, pozostały bez opieki rodzicielskiej, w tym z powodu i w wyniku wojny, oraz wymagających adopcji, a także dzieciom z zaburzeniami rozwojowymi, które wymagają usług wczesnej interwencji. Przedstawiono propozycje usprawnienia polityki publicznej w zakresie pomocy społecznej dzieciom w czasie wojny.

Słowa kluczowe:

system pomocy społecznej dzieci, polityka publiczna, wojna

Statement of the problem. In war, children are one of the most vulnerable and defenceless categories of civilians. This is especially true for children from the territories where hostilities are directly taking place, children of the “gray zone” and occupied territories – victims, internally displaced, socially vulnerable families with children, as well as children whose parents are (were) directly involved in hostilities. The occupation have an extremely negative impact on the lives of children, their health and development, and on the possibility of establishing a full life in the future, which determines the need to adapt to the consequences of the war and additional challenges for the country and Ukrainian society.

The problems of children’s social protection in war are quite wide. In our research we’ll consider in more detail:

- children’s injuries and deaths;
- abduction and illegal export of children to the territory of the aggressor country;
- adoption of children left without parental care, including for reasons and as a result of war;
- providing early intervention services to families with children with developmental disabilities.

Analysis of professional research and publications. In the domestic scientific literature, there are a number of studies on the analysis of social protection of children and problematic issues of the formation and implementation of public policy in this area. Among the scientists who deal with the outlined issues and have made a significant contribution to the research and development of the problem are A. Dakal, L. Kryvachuk, L. Melnychuk, O. Mordan, Yu. Kharchenko and others. The relevance of this children’s social protection research has increased in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. At the same time, there are practically no thorough research works of the war period. Therefore, our intelligence is based on knowledge of the real state of public policy in the field of social protection of children before the start of the war. In this

context, empirical research, in particular the fixation and observation of specific events and facts, as well as generalization, classification and description of results for the development of specific proposals are extremely important. It is also necessary to take into account the functioning of the system of social protection of children in the period before the start of the war and the existing gaps in public policy in this field.

Objective of the article. The article’s objective is to investigate the current state and problems of children’s social protection in wartime with the aim of developing proposals for improvements of public policy in this sphere.

Presentation of the main material. The analysis of the current situation regarding the children’s social protection in a full-scale war shows that the actions of the Russian Federation violate the rights of children to life and security, guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion, as of December 1, 2022, 441 children were killed and at least 852 children were injured of varying severity. Most children were affected in the following regions: Donetsk region – 401; Kharkiv – 231; Kyiv – 116; Mykolaiv – 72; Chernihiv – 68; Luhansk – 64; Kherson – 55; Zaporizhzhia – 47; Dnipropetrovsk – 26 (395 children in Ukraine..., 2022). According to the National Police of Ukraine, 328 children are considered missing and 7901 children have been found (Children of war..., 2022).

The Ukrainian side has documented that the Russian Federation abducts and takes children from Mariupol, Kharkiv, Luhansk and Donetsk regions. In particular, in Kharkiv region, about 150 children were forcibly seized from 11 communities, 135 children were taken from the controlled territories by the plane of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (as of September 20, 2022). According to the Ukrainian Regional Human Rights Center, more than a hundred children were taken out of the occupied Crimea

(37 children deported to the Russian Federation..., 2022).

It is known that the children are immediately granted Russian citizenship and are planned to be resettled in Russian families in Astrakhan, Voronezh, Kursk, Moscow, Murmansk, Nizhny Novgorod, Omsk, Penza, Rostov, Ryazan, Samara, Chelyabinsk regions and in the very north of Russia – in the Yamalo-Nenets District, Sakhalin, where climatic conditions are significantly different from Ukrainian ones, which complicates the children's adaptation. The program of abduction of Ukrainian children is headed by the children's ombudsman of Russia Lvova-Belova, at the state level there is a register of 1200 families who are ready to take care of and adopt Ukrainian children (Russia continues to abduct..., 2022). Thus, the removal of children from the temporarily occupied territories to Russia has become a state policy.

Different categories of children are deported from Ukraine: children who are taken by Russia together with their parents, with one of the parents or with a guardian; orphans or children deprived of parental care; children who were in boarding schools or sanatoriums at the time of the military aggression; children whose parents were killed as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion.

According to Russian media, more than 690 thousand Ukrainian children have already been deported to Russia, although domestic official statistics don't confirm these data. The situation with reliable data is complicated by the fact that Russia and Belarus don't respond to Ukraine's requests, so information must be sought from open sources or from statements submitted by relatives or friends of such children to law enforcement agencies of Ukraine or the National Information Bureau. According to the state portal for searching for children "Children of War" (a platform created by the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories together with the National Information Bureau on behalf of the Office of the President of Ukraine), as of December 1, of the current year, 8140 children

were deported and only 96 returned (Children of war..., 2022).

The discrepancy in the statistics presented both sides indicates the use of modern tools of Russian information warfare, which is used as a weapon in achieving political, information and psychological military aggression, turning the information space into a modern weapon of mass destruction. Here is another example of such a war: August 23, 2022. The Department for Family and Childhood of the Russian city of Krasnodar released information that more than a thousand children from Ukrainian Mariupol were adopted in Russia. It was reported that the children are now live in families in Tyumen, Irkutsk, Kemerovo and Altai Kray. The article said that more than 300 more children are waiting for adoption in specialized institutions of the Krasnodar region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine called the adoption illegal and accused Russia of abducting Ukrainian children. After that, the message was removed from the Russian website and informed that someone interfered with their system, and the Office didn't post such information.

It's worth recalling that the process of illegal deportation of children began in 2014 when almost 500 Ukrainian children were taken from the occupied Crimea and the occupied districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions "for treatment" in Russia. It was a project run by the state: the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Ministry of Health and the Investigative Committee were involved (37 children deported to the Russian Federation..., 2022). The Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine opened a criminal proceeding, but at first, it was registered as an illegal adoption and only later as a violation of the laws and customs of war.

It's known from the information sources of the aggressor country that the Federation Council of Russia proposes to introduce a systematic work on teaching the Russian language to children taken from Ukraine. They'll be forced to learn

the language of the aggressor and history in the version of Russian propaganda, in particular, that Ukraine and Ukrainians don't exist. Education in Russian schools is not only aimed at assimilation, but also at the destruction of Ukrainian identity. Such actions are a violation of Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that the education of the child should focus on the development of respect for the child's parents, cultural identity, language and national values of the country in which the child lives, the country of his or her origin (Kovalenko & Logvynenko, 2022). Thus, Putin's Russia seeks to deny the existence of the Ukrainian nation and its identity.

Thus, these actions can be qualified as deportation and genocide, which are international crimes. According to international conventions and documents of the International Criminal Court, if during an armed conflict local residents are forcibly transported to another country, it is deportation, which is classified as a war crime. Genocide is manifested in the fact that Russia takes children to its territory, places them in Russian families and grants them Russian citizenship. Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a decree on May 30, 2022, which simplified the issuance of Russian citizenship to Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories. Therefore, the occupiers chose the option that violates international conventions and do everything to ensure that the abducted Ukrainians receive Russian citizenship and assimilated into Russian society.

We agree with Dr. Azeem Ibrahim, Director of Special Initiatives at the New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy in Washington, D.C., who called the invasion "Russian genocidal war in Ukraine" (Azim, 2022).

Ukrainian public authorities are making incredible efforts to track the whereabouts and ensure the safety of children during the war, as well as to return illegally abducted and trafficked children from Ukraine. Therefore, according to

the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories (Minreintegration), in early October this year, 37 children were returned to Ukraine, who were illegally forcibly taken by Russians from the settlements of Kharkiv region, which were under occupation, to the Russian village of Kabardinka (near Gelendzhik), despite the fact that all of them have parents. According to the Ministry, the process of return was difficult, as parents traveled a long way through several European countries to pick up their children. The successful return was made possible thanks to the coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Reintegration, the State Migration Service, the Charitable Organization "SOS Children's Villages Ukraine" and carriers. Now, the children with their parents are in Ukraine, in Zakarpattia region (37 children deported to the Russian Federation..., 2022).

Amidst war, another category of children needs enhanced social protection – orphans and children deprived of parental care, children who were in institutional care institutions around the clock, as well as children who lost their parents due to military actions.

At the beginning of the war, there were 67586 orphans and children deprived of parental care in Ukraine: 63002 were brought up in family forms of education, namely 48089 – in the families of guardians/caregivers, 5830 children in foster families, 9083 – in family-type orphanages; 4584 children were in institutional care and education. After February 24, 2022, 14218 orphans and children deprived of parental care were evacuated to safer territories of Ukraine and abroad. However, most children continue to stay at their permanent place of residence, and 5495 children (as of 07/01/2022) are in the occupied or uncontrolled territory of Ukraine, which makes it impossible to provide social protection, psychological and physical safety (Children and war in Ukraine..., 2022).

It is worth paying special attention to the fact that the support of families in difficult life circumstances is under the special control of the

President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyy – the nationwide program “A Child is Not Alone” has been launched, which aims to help children who for various reasons were left without parental care, lost or whose rights were violated during the war, in which charitable funds were involved (Charity fund for children of heroes..., 2022). The Government of Ukraine has defined the procedure and conditions for the adoption of children during martial law, based on the priority of ensuring the best interests of the child, providing a simplified opportunity for adoptive parents to take children into their families, as well as expanding the circle of parents who are ready to give family warmth to children while their status is clarified. Support and assistance to families who adopted children in 2022 are provided by the Charitable Organization “SOS Children’s Villages Ukraine” together with the Ministry of Social Policy.

It’s worth noting that since the beginning of the full-scale war, there has been a significant increase in the number of people willing to adopt children into their families – more than 23 thousand people have declared their readiness to provide shelter for children and have undergone appropriate training (Ministry of Social Policy..., 2022). The simplification of the child adoption process was also made possible by the launch of an electronic adoption service through the national online portal for the provision of public services “Diia”, where the option of submitting two applications is offered: for consultation and for adoption. Such a digital innovation accumulates a database on this issue, and speeds up and formalizes the process from the moment of making a decision on adoption to the final execution of documents, which is very important in times of war.

In extremely difficult circumstances, early intervention services is being provided for families with children who have developmental disabilities or are at risk of developmental disabilities. The number of children with special needs aged 0–4 years is approximately 289–400 thousand

(Ministry of Social Policy..., 2022). The target group of beneficiaries includes families with: children diagnosed with developmental delays; children diagnosed with delays in mental, socio-emotional, communicative development; children at social risk; children at biological risk.

Before the large-scale war, there were 146 rehabilitation institutions for children with disabilities in Ukraine, including: 8 of national importance; 16 of regional importance; 69 of city importance; 50 of district importance; and 3 of united territorial communities. A network of inclusive resource centres was also created, which included 57 institutions. The number of recipients of such services was almost 6 thousand families with children (Ministry of Social Policy..., 2022).

At present, it is incredibly difficult for early intervention specialists to provide these services in full, while a number of institutions continue to operate, including the Early Intervention Center of the municipal non-profit enterprise “Children’s City Polyclinic No. 6” Odesa City Council, the municipal institution “Center for Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities “Malva” of Dnipro city, municipal educational institution “Kryvyi Rih Special Multidisciplinary Training and Rehabilitation Center 1” of Dnipropetrovsk region, municipal non-profit enterprise “Kramatorsk Children’s Home “Antoshka”, the team of the Charitable Foundation “Institute of Early Intervention”, which provide services mainly online. At the same time, the range of assistance has been expanded – advice is provided on evacuation routes and adaptation to a new place of stay, obtaining state social assistance during martial law, humanitarian and psychological assistance in war conditions; an online support group for parents has been created to relieve acute stress and stabilize the psycho-emotional state of adults and children.

Early intervention teams are also provided with support and assistance, training to gain knowledge and skills to work with trauma at an early age and supervision with the support of international experts from the European Association for Early

Intervention Eurliyd and the ARQ-foundation. Seminars, trainings, webinars are also held on-line on psychological assistance to survivors of sexual violence, peculiarities of providing early intervention services under martial law, providing psychological assistance to children who lost relatives in the war, etc (Traumatological care for [pregnant] families..., 2022).

Conclusion. Social protection of children during the war on the territory of Ukraine has become significantly more complicated. The research covers the analysis of the problems of the most socially vulnerable children's categories: children in need of adoption; children who were abducted and illegally taken to the territory of the aggressor country; children who were injured; children with developmental disabilities who need early intervention services.

All subjects of public administration have been actively involved in solving numerous problems – from ensuring the primary humanitarian needs of children to proving violations of international law in connection with the deportation and genocide of children, children's right to life and security. The current conditions require clear, coordinated and efficient cooperation and effective use of all types of resources of such structures as the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, the Ministry of Social Policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Social Service, the Office of the Adviser to the Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's Rights and Child Rehabilitation, the Regional Human Rights Center, regional state administrations, regional services for children, regional and local authorities. At the same time, many aspects of social protection of children in war remain relevant.

In our opinion, public policy in the sphere of children's social protection needs to be improved in the following aspects:

- acceleration and facilitation of the process of adoption, guardianship of children, creation

- of foster and adoptive families, it is necessary to simplify bureaucratic procedures as much as possible and to reduce the limits of the maximum number of children in one family;
- the level of financial support for children brought up in family-based care needs to be reviewed, and technical issues need to be addressed to minimize delays in the accrual or payment of state social assistance;
- raising funds and resources including non-governmental, to ensure the basic needs of children of these target groups in winter, first of all, warm and habitable housing;
- opportunities' expansion for specialists to provide early intervention services to families with children with developmental disabilities by attracting international experts and narrowly targeted sponsorship;
- the creation of conditions for proper training of social workers who do not have proper experience in emergency situations, developed protocols and instructions for action in such situations, do not have the skills and abilities necessary to protect themselves and clients of social institutions;
- the Unified Information and Analytical System "Children", which is designed for personalized registration of orphans, children deprived of parental care, children left without parental care, children in difficult life circumstances, needs to be brought in line with modern information requirements, because without it's impossible to monitor at all levels of government, which complicates the provision of social protection;
- special attention should be paid to information security, dissemination of reliable information and refutation of Russian propaganda in the sphere of social protection and children's rights, to control the interpretation of the meaningful essence of information and psychological warfare at the value and mental level of society, which can preserve the health of the nation and adequate perception

of reality, resources to counter aggression and manipulation;

- strengthening of the cooperation with charitable and international organizations that can pay for treatment, prosthetics of limbs of wounded children, especially those children who were orphaned;
- the difficult situation with abducted and illegally taken children to the territory of the aggressor country requires the involvement of international experts, investigative journalists and world public leaders in the organization and process of returning children to Ukraine.

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