

# DIALOGUES BETWEEN NORTHERN AND EASTERN EUROPE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSION

Theoretical and Practical Perspectives

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# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

## Tension between policy and practice

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### Introduction

Increased international orientation on the subject of inclusion has led to considerable changes and the development of education policy and practice, especially in special needs education (Ainscow, 2010; Haug, 2017); this has been evident over the last two decades in the post-Soviet countries (Bulat, Kara, & Solovey, 2016; Khitruk, 2015; Kolupayeva & Taranchenko, 2016; Kutepova & Suntsova, 2018, see the chapters in Part III).

In Ukraine, inclusion policies have been in place since 2001, and currently, the country is pursuing large-scale education reforms aimed at achieving the 'New Ukrainian School', which will embody a more inclusive ideology and accept diversity (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (CMU), 2016). However, there are still numerous barriers regarding inclusive education when it comes to ensuring equal rights for students with special educational needs (SEN). In Ukrainian society, there is a rather high level of consciousness regarding accepting inclusive values (European Research Association (ERA), 2012), an established theory of inclusive education (Kolupayeva, 2009, 2018) and a well-elaborated education policy (Grunevich, 2015; Sinyov, Sheremet, Rudenko, & Shulzhenko, 2016). Paradoxically, the country still does not provide sufficient implementation of inclusive practices. In the literature, the gap between policy and practice is discussed. Studies have shown that this gap is linked to insufficient conceptualisation of inclusion and inclusive education, and has complicated attempts to reach a consensus regarding the implementation of inclusive practices (see Hanssen and Khitruk, Chapter 1), Alishavskane, Onufrik & Florian, 2019; Loreman et al., 2016; Taranchenko, Kolupayeva, & Danilavichute, 2014). Currently, there is a lack of empirical studies

directly focusing on clarifying the gap between education policy and implementing inclusive education. Likewise, there is a lack of in-depth studies describing and analysing how the concept of inclusion is characterised by following its development in Ukrainian educational policy. However, in Ukraine, there is a need for an increased commitment to achieving a deeper understanding and elaboration of inclusion in the educational sector (Martynchuk, 2018). Responding to this demand, the current chapter aims to answer the following: *How are the concepts of inclusion, inclusive education and students with SEN conceptualised in educational policy documents?*

Before turning attention to the chapter, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term conceptualisation. Conceptualisation is the action or process of forming a concept or idea of something (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019). Thus, in this chapter, conceptualisation is understood as a definition and an expression of the concepts of inclusion, inclusive education and students with SEN. The chosen definition will help capture the features that best show the realisation of inclusion in Ukraine.

### Ukrainian educational context

In order to gain insights into the Ukrainian context, the historical frames and features of the educational settings are scrutinised.

In Ukraine, the right to education as a main human right is provided by the state to every child. Inclusion is incorporated into the legislation and is highlighted in central steering documents for school education (see the appendix). The right to special needs education for students is regulated by the Law of Ukraine on Education (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VRU), 2017). Until September 2018, the needs of all students with SEN were assessed by psychological, medical and pedagogical consultations (PMPC). PMPC specialists examined students at different stages of their lives and issued a conclusion and recommendations regarding the programme and forms for education. Starting in September 2018, the PMPC was reorganised into the Inclusive Resource Centers (IRC). The main tasks of the IRC are to provide a complex psychological-pedagogical assessment of students' needs and to give them systematic professional support within an inclusive educational environment (CMU, 2017a). Based on the assessment, the IRC and the parents decide which programme and forms of education are appropriate for a student. Ukraine strives to give the opportunity to all students to attend ordinary schools. Nonetheless, the educational culture is somehow slowly moving towards inclusion, and a great number of students with SEN are still placed in special schools, educational rehabilitation centres and full-time segregated classes while getting individual (home-based) forms of education.

### The first stage towards inclusion

The existence of well-established segregation policies tended to reflect the labels 'abnormal' and 'defect', i.e. those with disabilities towards whom the common social attitude was rejection (Kolupayeva & Taranchenko, 2016, p. 3). *The first stage*