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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION MECHANISMS IN THE CURRENT CONDITIONS OF MARTIAL LAW IN UKRAINE IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL PROTECTION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The article explores international cooperation mechanisms in the social protection of people with disabilities in Ukraine under martial law. It analyzes key international legal frameworks, bilateral agreements with Poland, and institutional mechanisms within the UN. Special attention is given to accessibility issues and practical initiatives, such as the development of an accessibility map in Kyiv. The study highlights the need for stronger international cooperation and inclusive policies to ensure equal rights and opportunities

Keywords: social protection, disabilities, international cooperation, Ukraine, accessibility

In the current conditions of martial law in Ukraine, the sphere of social protection for people with disabilities faces numerous challenges. The effectiveness of the relevant domestic mechanisms was questionable even before the war. But when the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion got underway, new economic issues surfaced that had a detrimental impact on the number and caliber of social services offered to individuals with disabilities. Meanwhile, the demand for these services has only increased due to the worsening financial situation, especially for those who lost their homes and/or were forced to relocate due to the occupation of their settlements or the outbreak of active hostilities nearby. As of May 2024, more than 150,000 people with disabilities were living only in Kyiv [1]. The WHO estimates that there are over a billion of these people worldwide. These statistical data once again underscore the objective necessity of creating effective mechanisms for international cooperation in matters concerning people with disabilities, particularly in terms of their social protection.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Most researchers point out the necessity for changes and reform of the entire security system of the world. The field of global social policy has paid little attention to disability. While social protection policies aimed at people with disabilities and their families have been the subject of research, little attention has been paid to disability in other spheres of global social policy, such as employment, healthcare, education, and health.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The most problematic issue is to promote the development of new empirical data and discussions regarding disability-inclusive social policies worldwide by bringing disability more prominently into the global social policy discourse.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to focus on people with disabilities' rights to social protection while considering international standards.

RESEARCH METHODS

The main methods applied by the authors: the general scientific principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematicity. A comprehensive and systematic approach was used, which allowed for a holistic, comprehensive, and consistent consideration of the problem.

MAIN TEXT

International cooperation in the field of social protection for people with disabilities is primarily based on a series of international legal documents that define their rights. One of the key documents in this area is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which obliges states to ensure the safety and rights of people with disabilities, especially during martial law [4]. Additionally, the protection of this social category is guaranteed by such international legal documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 1 states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights..."), and the Geneva Conventions on the Protection of War Victims [8]. Specifically, Articles 16-18, 20-22, and 98 of the Fourth Geneva Convention establish special protection standards for people with disabilities during armed conflicts, including their evacuation, transportation, treatment, and provision of material assistance [5]. Significant attention is also paid to protecting the rights of children with disabilities. The relevant provisions are primarily contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, several UN Security Council Resolutions address the provision of humanitarian aid and consideration of the specific needs of people with disabilities during wartime. Resolution 1894 (2009), for example, was the first to officially acknowledge that military conflicts particularly affect people with disabilities. It also stipulates that the parties to armed conflicts bear primary responsibility for taking all necessary measures to protect civilians, including meeting the specific needs of persons with disabilities [6].

In the UN system, the monitoring and enforcement of international agreements are carried out by treaty bodies, such as the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Individuals can directly submit complaints to this Committee, as provided for by the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ukraine has ratified both the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, meaning that any person with disabilities residing in Ukraine is under the protection of the UN Convention. Additionally, state parties to the Convention are required to submit periodic reports to the Committee on the implementation of the document's provisions. This allows the international community to monitor the compliance of national policies with international standards and make recommendations for improvement.

As stated above, there are a considerable number of international conventions and institutional mechanisms in the field of social protection of people with disabilities. However, it would be fair to note that international cooperation in this area is carried out mainly based on bilateral partnerships of certain states. As for Ukraine, such cooperation of our country with most other states usually takes place on similar principles. Therefore, to characterize such relations, it would be right to choose one of the partner states, for example—Poland. The foundation of cooperation between the two countries in the social sphere was laid by the Treaty on Good-Neighbourliness, Friendly Relations, and Cooperation between Ukraine and the Republic of Poland (May 18, 1992). Article 17, Part 2, of this treaty states that "the parties shall cooperate in the areas of insurance and social welfare" [7]. Subsequent bilateral agreements confirmed this cooperation, including Agreement on the Mutual Transfer of Pensions (1993), Agreement on Labor and Social Policy Cooperation (1994), Agreement on Mutual Employment of Workers (1994), Agreement on Social Security (2012), Agreement on Educational Cooperation (2015). Since the imposition of martial law in Ukraine, additional agreements have been concluded, such as the Political Declaration on the Social Protection of Children Affected by War and Armed Conflicts (2022). These agreements also include provisions for people with disabilities, ensuring additional legal and social guarantees in areas such as employment, entrepreneurship, education, and free medical assistance.

The described international cooperation mechanisms primarily aim at recognising the rights of people with disabilities and ensuring guarantees for their implementation. However, social protection is not only about financial assistance or social services—it is a broader concept aimed at ensuring that people with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities as other citizens. It is even stated on the official website of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine that one of the key measures aimed at achieving this goal is assistance in the integration of persons with disabilities into society [2]. A serious obstacle to this is the lack of accessibility in many institutions and public places (ramps, elevators, step-free entrances, etc.). In such a situation, it is critically important for individuals with disabilities to have access to information about the accessibility of any location they intend to visit. This enables them to plan convenient and barrier-free routes. The described international mechanisms are not able to influence the process of searching for and implementing an effective solution to this problem in the field of social protection of people with disabilities. Recognising this issue, students of the Faculty of Law and International Relations of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, in cooperation with the Kyiv City State Administration and the Municipal Enterprise "TIOI," are developing an accessibility map. This project aims to provide up-to-date information on the accessibility of institutions, shelters, pedestrian areas, and other spaces. Moreover, the initiative aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). However, for more effective implementation of such projects, public support and popularisation of information about the problems and challenges faced by people with disabilities, as well as appropriate solutions aimed at overcoming them, are necessary. This will help alleviate and improve the standard of living of people with disabilities,

especially in today's difficult conditions of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation.

CONCLUSION

So, the current conditions of martial law in Ukraine have highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of international cooperation mechanisms in the field of social protection for people with disabilities. While these mechanisms help ensure a basic level of protection, they are often insufficient. According to a survey conducted by the National Assembly of People with Disabilities in June 2022, 82.1% of respondents reported that their financial expenses increased during the war, or, if they decreased, it was only because they had to give up something they previously had [1, c.9]. In 2024, the amount of international aid available to people with disabilities significantly declined compared to the early days of the full-scale invasion. However, society's adaptation to the needs of people with disabilities has improved. Still, achieving a fully barrier-free environment remains a distant goal, even in Kyiv, where inclusive technologies are being implemented more actively than in other Ukrainian cities. Moving forward, Ukraine must not only adopt European practices but also develop its unique solutions, as no country in the world has a perfect system of social protection for people with disabilities. After the war, with the expected increase in the number of people with disabilities—including many veterans with severe injuries—our country not only has a unique opportunity to become a leader in inclusivity in Europe but must also take this step to ensure comfortable living conditions for all people without exception.

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