

Chapter 1.

ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: AN INCLUSIVE-INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH UNDER CONDITIONS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

| Kateryna Rumiantseva, Vitalina Pugach

Abstract. *The study examines the problem of ensuring equal access to educational resources in Ukrainian higher education institutions through an inclusive institutional approach. The purpose of the study is to substantiate the theoretical foundations for the development of social inclusion in the context of European integration, to develop a relevant concept, and to outline its implementation in the post-war period. The methodology is based on a comprehensive analysis of international practices, including the experience of the United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland, as well as the study of the European Union's regulatory and legal framework. The authors establish the need to move from the medical model of disability to a social-institutional model, in which the barrier is understood not as a person's health condition but as the inflexibility of the environment. The analysis demonstrates the effectiveness of the "personal budget" model and digital inclusion as instruments of learner autonomy. The study substantiates that the implementation of universal design standards and the principles of the Rome Communiqué is a strategic condition for modernizing higher education. The practical significance of the study lies in developing a "roadmap" for aligning Ukrainian legislation with the requirements of the European Higher Education Area.*

Keywords: *social inclusion; higher education; European integration; inclusive-institutional approach; reasonable accommodation; universal design; digital inclusion.*

Introduction

In the context of global transformations and Ukraine's integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the inclusive institutional development of education is becoming not only a requirement of social justice but also a strategic condition for modernizing the entire higher education system. The contemporary academic paradigm requires a transition from the "medical model" of disability, which focuses on individual deficits, to a "social-institutional model," in which the main barrier is understood not as a learner's health condition, but as the inflexibility of the educational environment. As Mel Ainscow notes in *Developing Equitable Education Systems*, inclusion is not a static state, but a dynamic process of removing barriers to participation and achievement for all learners without exception (Ainscow et al., 2025). For Ukrainian higher education institutions, this process is complicated by the need to adapt simultaneously to EU standards and to overcome the legacy of post-discriminatory practices.

In recent years, social inclusion has been actively developing in Ukrainian higher education institutions. This process has been driven by the adaptation of Ukrainian legislation to European norms and by the signing of international human rights agreements. At the legislative level, the right of persons with special needs to education has now been established, and the creation of a barrier-free environment for their learning has also been provided for. Despite this legal framework, the practical implementation of support for such learners in Ukrainian universities remains unsystematic. Most higher education institutions still do not have specialized support centres; therefore, educational adaptations are often the result of individual initiatives by teachers rather than a well-established institutional mechanism. In addition, there is an acute shortage of assistive technologies, universal design principles, and coordinated work among specialists of different profiles. The main challenges to social inclusion in higher education stem from insufficient teacher readiness, a lack of resources, and the absence of unified support standards. Under these conditions, the analysis of international practices becomes particularly important, as it should provide the

basis for creating a comprehensive and effective system of support for learners with special educational needs in Ukraine.

To address the stated problem and achieve the study's purpose, a comprehensive approach was adopted. It included a comparative analysis in which the provisions of Ukrainian legislation were compared with key EU documents, particularly Directive 2016/2102 and the Rome Communiqué of 2020, to identify gaps in the inclusive policies of Ukrainian universities. The institutional method was also used, enabling consideration of a higher education institution as an integrated system in which inclusion is implemented not as a set of isolated measures, but across governance, infrastructure, and digital content. The modeling and forecasting methods were applied based on successful cases from European countries. This enabled the development of a conceptual model of inclusive institutional development for Ukrainian higher education institutions in the post-war period.

The main sources of the study were official reports of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the provisions of the National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education until 2029, and monitoring results on the accessibility of university web resources. The analysis was carried out by systematizing international practices and critically assessing them in relation to the current situation in Ukraine.

The study's design is based on the principle of moving from the general to the specific. The first stage is devoted to the analysis of theoretical models of inclusion and their transformation under the influence of digital technologies. The second stage involves a critical review of European experience, with particular attention to mechanisms that ensure learners' autonomy, including those of the United Kingdom and Poland. The final stage focuses on developing practical recommendations for Ukrainian higher education institutions, covering both physical accessibility and the digital inclusiveness of educational content. Such a structure enables not only the identification of existing problems but also the formulation of a coherent strategy for inclusive institutional development.

The expected results and their scientific significance lie in moving beyond a purely formal approach to inclusion. First, the study conceptualizes reasonable accommodation not as a one-time measure but as a dynamic standard of educational quality that accounts for each learner's educational trajectory. Second, it substantiates universal design as a foundation for creating a barrier-free environment, from architecture to the interfaces of distance learning systems, which benefits all participants in the educational process, not only specific groups. Third, it identifies innovative support mechanisms: developing proposals for “personal budgets” and specialized digital services will lay the groundwork for learners with special educational needs (SEN) to achieve financial and technological autonomy.

The practical value of the study lies in the transition from declarative statements to effective institutional tools. Regarding the implementation of state strategies, the findings will provide a theoretical basis for the realization of the National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education until 2029 and support its alignment with European requirements. As a model for post-war recovery, the proposed conceptual model of inclusive-institutional development may serve as a basis for adapting higher education institutions to new realities. This includes creating inclusive hubs and support centers that can provide psychological and physical rehabilitation for veterans and individuals affected by hostilities within the educational process.

The European integration vector of the study is reflected in the proposed steps, which will contribute to the recognition of Ukrainian educational standards at the EU level, making higher education institutions more open, competitive, and human-centered.

For the purposes of this study, inclusive institutional development is understood as a multidimensional process operating at three interrelated levels. The first level is normative and legal. It concerns harmonizing Ukrainian legislation with international and European standards, including the principles of non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, universal design, and digital accessibility. The second level is institutional. It concerns the capacity of higher education institutions to transform legal requirements into stable organizational mechanisms, such as

support centers, accessibility policies, inclusive quality assurance procedures, and coordinated cooperation among administrative, academic, psychological, and technical units. The third level is practical and pedagogical. It concerns the direct support of learners through academic adaptation, assistive technologies, flexible educational trajectories, psychological support, and accessible digital content. The interaction of these three levels makes it possible to consider equal access not only as a declared right, but also as a system of institutional obligations and practical mechanisms that determine the quality of higher education.

Research Results

The term “social inclusion” began to be used actively in Europe and globally in the early 1960s.

The analysis of contemporary scholarly literature shows that “in the second decade of the twenty-first century, experts, researchers, and scholars interpret social inclusion in different ways, although with increasing conceptual precision. For example, the EU initiative, the European Pillar of Social Rights of 2017, aimed at building a strong social Europe in the twenty-first century that is fair, inclusive, and full of opportunities, combining social inclusion and social protection into a single category. In the concept of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the category ‘Social Protection and Inclusion’ is ensured through access to basic services, housing, social protection and health care, minimum income and unemployment benefits, childcare, pensions for older people, assistance for homeless persons, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities” (Orzhel et al., 2024).

Another interpretation of social inclusion was proposed by the World Bank. In the study *Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity*, two definitions of social inclusion are presented:

1. the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society;
2. the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society.

According to the World Bank's concept, social inclusion is ensured through access to three important spheres of life: markets, services, and spaces. These include land, housing, labor, and financial markets; social, information, transport, and educational services; health care; water and electricity supply; and other services, as well as political, physical, cultural, and social spaces. Access to markets, services, and spaces largely depends on education" (Orzhel et al., 2024).

In our view, the development of social inclusion in higher education institutions in Ukraine should be considered a dynamic, multidimensional process that is currently moving from formal legal recognition to concrete changes within these institutions. In this regard, the transformation of approaches in the European educational space is particularly indicative, as inclusion there has long gone beyond purely regulatory frameworks.

The experience of European Union countries in inclusive higher education demonstrates a transition from basic architectural accessibility to the creation of comprehensive ecosystems of learner support. In academic discourse, this process is often described through the concept of the "social dimension," which implies that the composition of the student body should fully reflect the diversity of society.

Based on individual countries' experiences, several key strategies can be identified that Ukraine may adapt in its European integration strategy.

For example, in the Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden and Denmark, inclusion is based on the principle of full state responsibility. These countries have developed a network of special-needs coordinators who support learners from admission through graduation. Scholars such as Göran Söderlund note that the success of the Swedish model lies in its decentralized resource allocation, in which each university receives targeted funding to support personal assistants, sign language interpreters, or specialized software (Söderlund et al., 2024). This approach makes inclusion a natural part of university life rather than an exception.

Germany demonstrates another, more structured approach through the system of student support organizations known as

Studentenwerke. These organizations are responsible not only for the educational process, but also for social and everyday aspects of student life. This includes creating inclusive student residences with rooms equipped in accordance with universal design standards, as well as providing consultations on study funding through special grants. Legally, the German system is based on the Framework Act for Higher Education, which obliges universities to ensure equal rights for learners with disabilities without any restrictions regarding their choice of specialty.

In the context of inclusive institutional development, the British Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) model is of particular interest (Department for Education, 2023). Its main legal difference from the Ukrainian system lies in the transition from institutional funding to direct subsidization of a specific learner's needs.

The Disabled Students' Allowance is a state grant regulated by the Education (Student Support) Regulations. Unlike general social benefits, the DSA is not a substitute for income. It has a clearly defined legal purpose: to cover additional costs that arise directly from a student's need for inclusive support. The mechanism for transferring funds is based on an individual entitlement, meaning that the right to receive funds belongs to the learner, not to the university. This implements the principle that "money follows the learner," which differs fundamentally from the Ukrainian approach, where budgetary funding for inclusion is often absorbed into the institution's general expenditures. Under the DSA model, a needs assessment is conducted, and funds are allocated only after an independent audit of needs has been carried out by a certified center, which legally confirms the objectivity of the expenses.

British legislation clearly distinguishes the areas in which these funds may be used, allowing the learner to independently form their own support ecosystem:

1. Non-medical helper allowance: payment for the services of assistants, readers, and sign language interpreters. The learner chooses the service provider independently, which creates a market for high-quality support services.

2. Specialist equipment allowance: funds for the purchase of personal technical aids, such as screen readers or ergonomic equipment, which remain the property of the learner.
3. Additional expenses: payment for specific costs, including copying materials or specialized transport.

In comparison with Ukrainian Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 635 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2019), several critical points can be identified, primarily autonomy and dependence. In Ukraine, the learner depends on the higher education institution's capacity to provide support, including the availability of an assistant on staff or the institution's purchase of equipment. In the United Kingdom, through the DSA, the learner becomes an autonomous subject who "purchases" the necessary services, thereby reducing the problem of institutional inertia. The Ukrainian model provides for allocating funds to the institution, for example, to support an inclusive group of up to 3 persons. By contrast, the British DSA model focuses on personalization: if a learner needs a specific program that is not available at the university, they can purchase it using grant funds.

The implementation of elements of a personal budget in Ukraine within the framework of the National Strategy until 2029 would require amendments to the Budget Code, a transition from financing staff positions, such as assistants in higher education institutions, to a mechanism of direct subsidy for the learner, and regulation of the status of an assistant. This means legally recognizing an assistant as an independent service provider, rather than merely a university employee. Therefore, the "personal budget" model represented by the DSA demonstrates the highest degree of implementation of the social-institutional model. It transforms the learner from an object of care into a subject who manages their own educational process, which is one of the ultimate aims of the European integration of Ukrainian higher education.

The experience of Poland, which has undergone rapid institutional transformation, is also of interest for Ukraine. Polish higher education institutions use a system of disability grants (*dotacja na niepełnosprawność*). The more learners with officially

documented special needs a university has, the more funding the institution receives for developing inclusive infrastructure. Joanna Głodkowska, in *Inclusive Education: Unity in Diversity*, emphasizes that this mechanism fostered healthy competition among universities to attract learners with special educational needs, leading to rapid improvements in campus accessibility (Głodkowska, 2020).

An important component of the European experience is also the implementation of digital inclusion. In the Baltic countries, particularly Estonia, all university learning materials are expected to comply with accessibility standards by default, including subtitles for video lectures, text descriptions for images, and adaptation for screen readers. This ensures equal access to knowledge in distance-learning conditions, which is highly relevant to the current Ukrainian situation.

These examples show that inclusive development is not only about changing laws, but also about creating financial and social incentives for universities.

The application of international experience in Ukraine requires consideration of the sociocultural background, available resources, and the autonomy of higher education institutions. A priority should be the development of unified standards to support learners with inclusive needs, thereby improving their learning outcomes and professional integration. For the reform of higher education in Ukraine, the following aspects of international experience are of particular importance: the creation of official university support services for learners with special educational needs, the implementation of universal design in the educational process, the targeted development of teachers' inclusive competence, and the establishment of comprehensive cooperation among all structural units of higher education institutions.

An analysis of European practices allows us to distinguish several complementary models of support relevant to Ukraine. The first may be defined as a service-coordination model. It is represented by the Scandinavian and German experience, where inclusion is ensured through specialized coordinators, student support services, accessible residences, and institutional mechanisms of academic and social assistance. The second is a

financially personalized model, most clearly represented by the British Disabled Students' Allowance, in which support is linked to the individual needs of the learner rather than to the average needs of the institution. The third is a digitally standardized model, based on the requirement that digital resources, platforms, e-books, websites, and mobile applications comply with accessibility standards by default. For Ukraine, these models should not be considered as mutually exclusive alternatives. Their combined implementation may provide a basis for a coherent, inclusive ecosystem in higher education, where legal guarantees are supported by institutional services, targeted funding, accessible digital infrastructure, and personalized educational support.

The formation of inclusive policy in Ukraine is based on the principles embedded in international acts that the state has ratified and implemented into its own legal system.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Article 24, is not merely a declaration, but a legal foundation (United Nations, 2006). The main requirement of Article 24 is that states must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. The key term here is "reasonable accommodation." In the context of higher education institutions, this means that a university cannot refuse an applicant solely because appropriate conditions are absent. On the contrary, the institution must modify its environment, for example, by moving a lecture to the ground floor or providing a sign language interpreter, to ensure the right to education.

The EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 introduces the concept of universal design (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024). Unlike "accommodation," which is provided for a specific person, universal design requires educational content and space to be created as accessible to everyone from the outset. For example, video lectures with subtitles are useful not only for persons with hearing impairments, but also for international students.

The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union is also an integral part of the development of inclusive-institutional education in the context of European integration. In the field of higher education, Article 431 obliges

Ukraine to reform its education system in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process (Association Agreement..., 2014). One of the central reference points here is the “social dimension,” which requires higher education to be accessible to all social groups. Ukraine must implement the ESG and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2015), which include inclusiveness as an integral part of internal quality assurance in universities.

The formation of inclusive institutional development in this context should be understood as the creation of a system of reasonable accommodation and universal design that makes the educational space accessible, flexible, and inclusive for all participants in the academic process. This approach can be observed in the example of Directive 2000/78/EC, which should be regarded not merely as an anti-discrimination act, but as a fundamental legal instrument that has transformed European educational law. Although the Directive formally concerns employment, its provisions have become a benchmark for the higher education sector regarding reasonable accommodation.

A detailed analysis of Directive 2000/78/EC in the context of inclusive institutional development in education should begin with the legal qualification of reasonable accommodation under Article 5 (Council Directive 2000/78/EC, 2000). This is a key provision of the Directive that Ukraine is implementing into its own legislation. The essence of this provision is that the Directive obliges institutions to take effective and practical measures to ensure that a person with a disability has access to education, provided that such measures do not impose a disproportionate burden on the institution. It is important to emphasize that, according to the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, the proportionality of such a burden is assessed with regard to financial and other costs, as well as the size and financial resources of the organization. This directly corresponds to the need to create financial incentives for universities.

The prohibition of indirect discrimination, established in Article 2 of the Directive, introduces a concept that is critical to the analysis of the inflexibility of the educational environment. Indirect discrimination occurs when an apparently neutral

provision, criterion, or practice places persons with disabilities at a disadvantage compared with other persons. In higher education, for example, a requirement to take an examination only in written form, without the option to use assistive technologies, may constitute indirect discrimination, even if it is formally applied to all learners equally.

Positive action, provided for in Article 7 of the Directive, allows Member States to adopt measures to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to disability. In institutional terms, this legitimizes quota systems, special admission conditions, and additional funding, such as the Polish disability-grant model. This provision also supports the legitimacy of special conditions for learners with special educational needs in Ukrainian higher education institutions, as established by Resolution No. 635 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

The burden of proof, as addressed in Article 10, is a significant rule for protecting learners' rights. Its mechanism provides that when a learner presents facts that make it possible to presume the existence of discrimination, for example, the failure to provide an individual educational plan, the burden of proving the absence of discrimination shifts to the university. The introduction of this rule into Ukrainian practice requires higher education institutions to maintain careful documentation of every step taken to ensure inclusion, thereby transforming inclusion into an imperative of institutional functioning.

The analysis of Directive 2000/78/EC allows us to conclude that it functions as a legal mechanism that transforms inclusion from an ethical obligation into a strict legal requirement. For Ukraine, this means not only declaring rights but also creating procedural guarantees for their protection, as envisaged by the Strategy until 2029.

In addition to Directive 2000/78/EC, it is necessary to consider acts regulating digital and institutional accessibility, which are now among the European Union's priorities. The European Accessibility Act, Directive (EU) 2019/882, in the context of higher education, enables the transition from architectural barrier-free access to full digital inclusion of educational content. Although the Directive is oriented toward the

market for goods and services, its influence on the academic environment is fundamental because it standardizes the resources learners use.

A detailed analysis of the key aspects of Directive (EU) 2019/882 shows that, in the educational context, its scope encompasses digital products critical to modern higher education, such as e-books and specialized software. Article 2 establishes that all e-books and the software used to read them must be accessible (Directive (EU) 2019/882, 2019). This means that university libraries and publishers are obliged to ensure that literature is compatible with screen readers and that text formatting can be modified. Since many universities use paid platforms to access academic databases, these interfaces must also meet strict accessibility criteria. Annex I of the Directive introduces the principle of “functional performance criteria,” which goes beyond a simple technical description. Information must be presented in a way that can be perceived through multiple sensory channels, for example, by including mandatory text descriptions for graphs in academic papers. The interfaces of educational platforms must be predictable, and the content must be easy to perceive, which is particularly important for learners with cognitive disorders or dyslexia.

As a result, the implementation of Directive (EU) 2019/882 creates new legal obligations for Ukrainian higher education institutions within the framework of European integration and the National Strategy until 2029. These obligations concern the standardization of procurement. When purchasing computer equipment or licenses for learning management systems (LMS), universities must legally comply with the accessibility requirements established in the Directive. This also encourages a transition from isolated accommodation to creating content that is accessible to all from the outset. Directive (EU) 2019/882 refers to the EN 301 549 standard, which describes in detail the technical parameters of ICT accessibility, including requirements for contrast, subtitles in video lectures, and navigation without a mouse. This is important as evidence that inclusion is moving from the category of a “humanitarian aspiration” to the level of a technical regulation. Similar to Directive 2000/78/EC, this Act contains a reservation concerning financial capacity: when

ensuring full accessibility requires a fundamental alteration of a product or imposes a disproportionate financial burden, an organization may be exempted from certain obligations. This creates a risk zone in which educational institutions may avoid change by referring to a lack of funds. Therefore, for Ukraine, it is important to combine these norms with the Polish model of targeted funding for inclusion.

The European Accessibility Act completes the formation of the inclusive institutional framework by making digital barrier-free access a mandatory legal requirement. For Ukrainian higher education institutions, this means a full review of electronic learning resources to ensure compliance with EU standards by 2029.

The analysis of the Rome Communiqué of 2020 in this monograph substantiates the transition from inclusion as a separate social project to inclusion as a fundamental component of the strategic management of every university. This is a key stage in aligning Ukrainian education with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

For the first time at a high political level, the Rome Communiqué approved the “Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA” (Rome Communiqué, 2020). According to this document, the social dimension means creating conditions in which the composition of the student body at all levels and in all fields of education reflects the diversity of the population. This definition shifts the focus from “providing assistance” to “ensuring representativeness.” For Ukraine, it provides a normative basis for expanding the system of quotas and special admission conditions envisaged in the National Strategy until 2029. The main requirement of the Rome Communiqué is that inclusion should not be an “addition” to the core activities of a university. Therefore, universities are obliged to integrate inclusiveness into their long-term development strategies, quality assurance plans, and budget planning. As a result, inclusion in Ukraine becomes an imperative requirement for accreditation. If inclusiveness is not embedded in a higher education institution's strategy, the institution does not comply with the Bologna Process standards.

It is appropriate to identify three fundamental principles of the Rome Communiqué that should be implemented in Ukraine. The first is a holistic approach, which means inclusion should cover not only classroom access but also teaching methods, counseling, financial support, and the institution's cultural environment. The second is the flexibility of educational trajectories. The document requires the creation of flexible learning pathways, which, in Ukrainian legislation, are implemented through the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) in accordance with Resolution No. 635 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. The third principle is the need for states to collect reliable data on the participation of vulnerable groups in education. This legally substantiates the need to establish inclusion-monitoring systems in Ukraine at the Unified State Electronic Database on the education level.

When comparing the requirements of the Communiqué with the Ukrainian situation, it can be argued that Ukraine has already laid out a “roadmap” for these changes through the National Strategy until 2029, which, in fact, serves as an instrument for the direct implementation of the Rome Communiqué. However, a significant gap remains. The main challenge is the transition from formal compliance with requirements, such as the presence of a ramp, to a real transformation of academic culture, including universal design in teachers’ thinking, as required by the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Thus, the Rome Communiqué of 2020 gives inclusion the status of a mandatory element of institutional autonomy and responsibility of higher education institutions. For this study, this serves as evidence that the formation of inclusive institutional development in Ukraine is an irreversible process, determined by its participation in the European Higher Education Area.

The analysis of Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies enables an expansion of the discussion regarding the digital transformation of higher education. This document is critically important because it directly classifies public universities as entities obliged to ensure the inclusiveness of their virtual space. Directive (EU) 2016/2102 establishes that accessibility is not merely a convenient website interface, but the full functionality of

all digital resources (Directive (EU) 2016/2102, 2016). This includes the following:

1. Educational platforms (LMS): systems such as Moodle or Google Classroom used by universities must be fully adapted for screen readers and keyboard-only navigation.
2. Administrative services: applicant electronic accounts, course registration systems, and online libraries must comply with barrier-free accessibility standards.
3. Mobile applications: any official applications of higher education institutions, including schedules and campus maps, fall within the requirements of the Directive.

The Directive legally references the EN 301 549 standard, which is based on the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. It also introduces two important procedural tools that Ukraine should implement within the framework of the National Strategy until 2029. The first is the Accessibility Statement, under which each university must publish a detailed report on the accessibility status of its resources on its website, indicating which elements still require adaptation. The second is a feedback mechanism, according to which a student must have the legal right to report inaccessible content and receive a response within established time limits. In addition, Article 5 of the Directive allows temporary derogations from the requirements if they create a disproportionate burden for the institution.

From a legal perspective, this means that a university must conduct a financial and technical analysis to prove the impossibility of immediate adaptation. However, according to the Rome Communiqué of 2020, such derogations should be the exception rather than the rule. Therefore, a risk for Ukraine is that this provision may be used by higher education institutions to delay digital transformation. For this reason, this criterion should be clearly regulated in Ukrainian legislation.

In summary, the integration of Directive (EU) 2016/2102 into Ukrainian legislation serves as the basis for implementing the requirements for digital accessibility set out in Resolution of the

Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 635. It provides the technical content of the concept of universal design in the digital environment. Compliance with this Directive also becomes part of the internal quality assurance system in education, in accordance with the ESG, and transforms digital accessibility from an “additional option” into a strict administrative and legal requirement. For Ukrainian higher education institutions, this means not only the physical modernization of campuses but also the creation of an inclusive virtual learning space that complies with EU standards by 2029.

It is also necessary to analyze in detail the National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education until 2029, which defines the long-term development direction and the gradual removal of barriers across the entire educational system. For a comprehensive legal characterization, it should be considered a strategic policy document that determines the direction of state policy in inclusive education within the context of European integration. The National Strategy is a strategic planning effort. It has a comprehensive character and is not a law of direct application; however, it serves as a mandatory reference point for the legislative activities of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and relevant ministries.

The Strategy is based on the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular Article 24, and aligns with the provisions of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union on the modernization of higher education institutions. The document serves as a “roadmap” that transforms international standards of inclusion into specific objectives for the Ukrainian legal system until 2029. The Strategy confirms the rejection of outdated approaches to the regulation of the education of persons with special educational needs (SEN). It finally legitimizes the transition from the medical model of disability, or the deficit-based approach, to the social-institutional model. This rights-based approach focuses not on the student’s health condition, but on the institution’s obligation to remove barriers.

The Strategy also specifies the right to reasonable accommodation, defining the failure to provide such accommodation, for example, the absence of sign language

interpretation or architectural inaccessibility, as direct discrimination. One of the key aspects of the Strategy is the connection between inclusiveness and the quality of higher education. According to the logic of legislative development embedded in the Strategy, the accessibility of the educational environment becomes a mandatory condition for the accreditation of educational programs. This transforms inclusion from a voluntary initiative into an imperative requirement for the functioning of higher education institutions. The Strategy directs the system toward implementing European quality assurance standards, namely the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, in which inclusiveness is an integral criterion of internal university evaluation.

The Strategy until 2029 is a key instrument for synchronizing Ukrainian law with EU law. Unlike isolated accommodation, the Strategy promotes universal design in education, requiring the creation of content that is accessible to all users by default. Thus, the document aligns with the strategic goal of the Bologna Process, which is to ensure that the composition of the student body fully reflects the diversity of society. The National Strategy through 2029, therefore, provides a legal foundation for creating a coherent support ecosystem within Ukrainian higher education institutions. It transforms inclusion into a strategic condition for modernizing the higher education system under the conditions of integration into the European Higher Education Area.

In recent years, Ukraine has made significant progress in aligning its national legislation with European requirements. In particular, the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014) considers inclusion through the prism of educational quality. Non-compliance with accessibility requirements may serve as grounds for refusing accreditation of an educational program. This transforms inclusiveness from the "goodwill" of a higher education institution's administration into a mandatory condition for its lawful functioning.

Resolution No. 635 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which establishes the procedure for organizing inclusive education in higher education institutions, is the most detailed mechanism

for translating legal norms into specific administrative actions by higher education institutions (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2019). It provides for the following:

1. Inclusive groups: the procedure stipulates that, for effective learning, one group should include no more than three persons with special educational needs. This is intended to ensure that the teacher can give sufficient attention to each learner, in line with European standards for pedagogical workload.
2. Individual Educational Plan (IEP): The resolution establishes the student's right to adapt the schedule and methods of learning. For example, if a student requires more time to complete tasks due to physical or cognitive characteristics, this should be documented in the IEP.
3. Assistant of the learner: the document distinguishes between academic support and social or everyday assistance, allowing assistants to be involved in providing technical help during classes.

An assessment of Resolution No. 635 shows that this document transforms abstract "social justice" into an algorithm for administrative actions. It ensures the transition from simple architectural accessibility to the creation of a coherent support ecosystem, which is a necessary step for Ukraine's integration into the European Higher Education Area.

To substantiate the thesis that inclusive norms are mandatory for the lawful functioning of higher education institutions, it is also necessary to analyze the control instruments that transfer inclusion from the sphere of a "social mission" to the sphere of legal responsibility. This analysis can be carried out along two main vectors: the academic vector, represented by the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA), and the technical and construction-related vector, represented by the State Building Standards of Ukraine.

The Regulation on the Accreditation of Educational Programs in Higher Education, implemented by the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance, is the main instrument of external quality control. The legal characterization of Criterion 9,

“Learning Environment and Resources” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2017), establishes a direct relationship between the successful accreditation of an educational program and the existence of an inclusive environment. According to the accessibility requirement, the institution must confirm not only the availability of resources but also their alignment with the needs of learners with special educational needs. Legally, this means that inclusion is a determinant of the legitimacy of educational activity. If a higher education institution does not ensure architectural and digital accessibility, its educational program cannot be accredited, which in turn makes it impossible to issue state-recognized diplomas. Thus, state control through the accreditation system makes inclusiveness an imperative. During accreditation visits, NAQA expert groups examine not only the presence of ramps but also the accessibility of library collections, the adaptation of the distance-learning system, and staff qualifications. This encourages higher education institutions to develop inclusion systematically rather than episodically.

Technical and legal control is provided through DBN V.2.2-40:2018, “Inclusiveness of Buildings and Structures” (Ministry of Regional Development, 2018). The adoption of these standards was a significant step, as they are mandatory according to the Law of Ukraine “On Building Standards.” Inclusion has therefore ceased to be an evaluative concept and has acquired mathematically measurable characteristics. For example, doorways must be at least 0.9 meters wide to allow free wheelchair access. The slope of ramps is clearly limited to 8% at external entrances, ensuring safe and independent movement. Tactile navigation is also required, including tactile floor strips and Braille signs for persons with visual impairments. In terms of legal responsibility, violations of these standards during the design, construction, or operation of buildings at higher education institutions entail administrative liability. Moreover, under the licensing conditions, the absence of an act confirming compliance of the premises with accessibility-related building standards may constitute grounds for revoking a license for educational activity.

This confirms the thesis of institutional transformation, according to which a university is regarded not only as an

educational center but also as a public space that must, by default, be safe and accessible to all categories of citizens.

The analysis of these regulations allows us to conclude that the combination of accreditation control through NAQA and technical regulation through the State Building Standards creates a “double framework” of responsibility for higher education institutions. This includes academic responsibility, meaning the impossibility of accrediting a program without inclusive resources, and administrative and economic responsibility, meaning the impossibility of legally operating buildings without compliance with physical accessibility standards.

These control instruments are a logical continuation of Resolution No. 635, as they ensure its implementation through real sanctioning and regulatory mechanisms. This ultimately confirms Ukraine’s transition to the European model of inclusive development, in which human rights are protected not only by declarations but also by strict technical and legal standards.

The study confirms that the formation of inclusive institutional development in higher education in the context of Ukraine’s European integration is a systemic process of transition from a philanthropic to a rights-based model. This transformation is based on three fundamental dimensions.

First, there is the regulatory and legal imperative. Through the implementation of Directive 2000/78/EC and the principles of the Rome Communiqué of 2020, inclusion in Ukraine has finally been transformed from a “voluntary social initiative” of a higher education institution into an imperative condition for its legitimate functioning. The analysis of NAQA criteria and Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 635 shows that non-compliance with accessibility standards, both architectural and digital, now entails direct legal consequences, ranging from refusal to accredit educational programs to the revocation of licenses.

Second, there is technological and digital convergence. The European Accessibility Act (Directive (EU) 2019/882) and the European Accessibility Act (Directive (EU) 2016/2102) establish a new standard for Ukrainian higher education institutions: the transition to universal design. This means that the inclusiveness of the digital educational space, including LMS platforms, online

libraries, and mobile applications, should not be provided only upon a student's request, but should be an embedded characteristic of the educational product by default.

Third, there is economic personalization. The analysis of the British personal budget model, represented by the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), and the Polish experience indicates the need for further reform of Ukrainian financial law. The key direction should be a shift from financing the "average needs of the institution" to the direct subsidization of a specific learner's needs. This would reduce institutional inertia and give students real autonomy in choosing support options.

The National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education acts as the legal bridge that should ultimately synchronize Ukrainian legislation with the requirements of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). However, the success of this strategy depends not only on improving technical regulations, such as the State Building Standards, but also on overcoming institutional inertia by embedding inclusion into the development strategy of every university as an integral part of academic culture.

Thus, inclusive institutional development is not only a requirement of the time but also a marker of the capacity of Ukrainian higher education institutions to become full and competitive elements of the global educational environment, where the right to education is realized through the actual removal of barriers rather than their formal recognition.

After the adoption of the Law "On Higher Education," the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine for 2021–2031, the National Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education for 2020–2030, and a number of other resolutions, inclusion became a mandatory component of the development strategy of every higher education institution.

This applies not only to learners with inclusive needs, but also to internally displaced persons (IDPs), veterans, representatives of ethnic minorities, and persons who have found themselves in difficult life circumstances.

At the same time, the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine for 2021–2031 defines the main priorities for higher education development, including inclusiveness, accessibility, equality, and diversity (Voronina-Pryhodii, 2025). Among the five strategic goals, two are related to the priority of social inclusion: ensuring high-quality educational and research activities and competitive higher education accessible to different segments of the population; and ensuring effective governance in a socially responsible higher education system.

There is no doubt that inclusion and equality can also potentially improve the quality of education within the national education system.

We are also convinced that social inclusion is a process that ensures equal opportunities for all learners to realize their life potential.

At the same time, it should be noted that, for post-war Ukrainian society, the most relevant group to which social inclusion measures will apply will be learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This group includes citizens with different experiences and war-related trauma, such as military personnel, veterans, internally displaced persons, citizens who lived in occupied territories, citizens who left Ukraine and later returned, people who lost friends, relatives, family members, employment, or property, persons who experienced physical and psychological trauma during martial law, children and relatives of the above-mentioned persons, and other social groups and categories of citizens in the country as a whole.

The armed aggression of the Russian Federation has led to an increase in the number of persons with physical and mental health impairments, creating barriers to education and professional realization. Large-scale destruction and occupation of territories have also caused mass internal displacement and the need for retraining.

At present, state and civic initiatives aimed at the adaptation of persons affected by war place particular responsibility on higher education institutions. The tasks of professional retraining, psychological support, and the promotion of the population's

economic activity are coming to the forefront. Accordingly, the principles of inclusion should be integrated into the general strategy for the development of higher education, on an equal basis with academic standards and international cooperation.

On the basis of the theoretical analysis of the problem under study and our own experience of working in a higher education institution, we identified the key components of social inclusion in education:

1. Architectural accessibility, including barrier-free access to academic buildings, dormitories, libraries, and the arrangement of classrooms, such as adjustable desks and sound absorption.
2. Academic adaptation, including the provision of materials in different formats, such as text, audio, and video, individual educational plans, flexible deadlines for assignments, and the use of assistive technologies, including screen readers and speech-to-text software.
3. Socio-psychological integration, including work with teachers to overcome stereotypes, peer tutoring and mentoring programs, and the creation of an inclusive community in which diversity is perceived as a value.

These components require more detailed consideration.

Architectural accessibility is the creation of a physical environment in educational institutions that enables every higher education learner, regardless of physical ability, to move freely and use the premises and services (Dzhurylo, 2026). It is the foundation of inclusive education, as it guarantees equal access to educational services.

The main components of architectural accessibility include the following:

1. Accessible entrance: the presence of at least one entrance adapted for persons with reduced mobility, including the absence of thresholds and sufficient door width.

2. Ramps and lifts: the installation of standard-compliant ramps with an appropriate slope, or elevators and platform lifts providing access to upper floors.
3. Interior space: widened doorways, obstacle-free corridors, and accessible common areas, including libraries, canteens, and assembly halls.
4. Sanitary facilities: specially equipped toilets with grab bars and sufficient space for a wheelchair.
5. Navigation and marking: the use of tactile signs, including Braille, contrasting stair markings, and audio signals for persons with visual or hearing impairments.

The main principles for implementing architectural accessibility in inclusive education are universal design, reasonable accommodation, and barrier-free access. Universal design means creating a space that is convenient for all users from the outset, without the need for additional adaptation. Reasonable accommodation refers to specific changes and modifications made to ensure the rights of an individual with a disability when universal design does not fully address a particular need. Barrier-free access involves removing any physical or informational obstacles on the path to learning.

The creation of an architecturally accessible environment not only fulfills the requirements of the Law of Ukraine "On Education," but also contributes to the socialization of learners with special educational needs by preventing their isolation.

Academic adaptation in inclusive education refers to changes in teaching methods and assessment approaches for learners with special educational needs, without simplifying the curriculum itself (Lytvynova et al., 2018). The main purpose of academic adaptation in inclusive education is to provide learners with equal access to knowledge while taking into account their individual characteristics, including vision, hearing, pace of work, attention span, and other factors.

The selection of assistive technologies is one of the first steps toward making learning in Ukrainian higher education institutions genuinely barrier-free (Nikolenko, 2024). These tools help compensate for certain functional limitations, allowing

students to focus on the content rather than how they access it (table 1).

Table 1

Assistive Technologies in Inclusive Education

Category	Examples of tools	For whom they are important
Screen readers	NVDA, JAWS, or built-in VoiceOver. These tools convert on-screen text into speech or Braille.	Learners with visual impairments
Text input technologies	Voice typing, adaptive keyboards, and eye-tracking systems	Learners with motor impairments
Visual support	Screen magnifiers, high-contrast modes, and special fonts for persons with dyslexia, such as OpenDyslexic	Learners with partial vision loss or dyslexia
Hearing support	Automatic captioning systems, such as Live Caption, and FM systems that transmit sound directly to a hearing aid	Learners with hearing impairments

Source: developed by the authors.

In Ukraine, universities have already established special resource centers where students can use such devices. However, technologies are effective only when educational content, including PDF files and presentations, is properly prepared.

Artificial intelligence (AI) can also support learners with special needs in several ways. First, AI can support content transformation through multimodality. It can instantly convert a photograph of lecture notes into structured text or read aloud a complex article through text-to-speech tools, which is critically important for persons with visual impairments. Second, AI can simplify and structure information. For students with autism spectrum disorders or dyslexia, AI can help identify the main points in a large body of text and remove unnecessary “information noise.” Third, AI can generate descriptions, including alt text. Modern models can accurately depict what a textbook graph or diagram shows, making visual information accessible to all learners. Fourth, AI can support the personalization of pace. AI

tutors allow learners to review material as many times as necessary without fear of judgment or pressure.

The main components of socio-psychological integration in higher education institutions should include support centers where psychologists assist learners with adaptation and help teachers master appropriate methods for working with diverse learners. The entire university community should follow the principles of inclusive "person-first" ethics, which hold that the person, rather than their diagnosis or status, comes first. This concerns how to communicate appropriately, how to offer help, whether to offer help without being requested, and which terms to avoid to avoid offense. Student volunteers should support their peers in everyday and academic matters, thereby contributing to the socialization of both parties.

Psychological centers for social inclusion in higher education institutions in Ukraine are specialized units that provide support to students with special educational needs and help create a barrier-free environment. Their activities are regulated by Resolution No. 635 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which defines the procedure for organizing inclusive education in higher education institutions. Such centers should include a practical psychologist responsible for psychological well-being and corrective work, as well as a social pedagogue who provides socio-pedagogical support and assistance with socialization.

The main functions of such centers should include the following (Nikolenko, 2024):

1. Psychological support: individual counseling, assistance with adaptation to the educational process, and career guidance.
2. Social integration: organization of activities aimed at including students in the sociocultural life of the university.
3. Needs monitoring: diagnosis of needs and development of individual support plans.
4. Methodological work: training teachers in methods of working with inclusive groups.

Summarizing the above, it can be stated that the most significant indicators of social inclusion in higher education institutions should include the formation of an inclusive and barrier-free educational environment; access to adapted didactic materials and technical aids for persons with special educational needs; the implementation of financial support mechanisms, such as grants, scholarships, and loans, for vulnerable categories of students; the creation of conditions for personalized educational plans that take into account the needs of each learner; the appointment of a person responsible for implementing inclusive practices; measures aimed at developing an inclusive culture and preventing bullying; active involvement of student self-government in promoting inclusive policy; the use of variable learning models, including distance, asynchronous, and hybrid learning; multimodal presentation of information that takes into account the diversity of the student body, including social and cultural diversity; the introduction of flexible methods for assessing learning outcomes; the integration of specialized digital technologies to support students with special educational needs; and the organization of psychological support for participants in the educational process.

Post-War Expansion of Reasonable Accommodation: Inclusive Safety, Veteran Support, and Digital Rights

In the Ukrainian wartime and post-war context, the concept of reasonable accommodation should be expanded to include a security component. Traditionally, reasonable accommodation in European legal practice is associated with architecture, curricula, assessment procedures, and access to learning resources. However, under conditions of war, the right to education cannot be separated from the right to safety. Therefore, inclusive safety should be considered as an integral component of the inclusive institutional development of higher education.

First, higher education institutions should ensure not only the formal availability of shelters, but also their accessibility for persons with different nosologies. This includes tactile navigation, visual alarm notifications for persons with hearing impairments, accessible routes to shelters, and specialized resting places for

persons with musculoskeletal disorders. The absence of an inclusive shelter should be interpreted not only as an infrastructural deficit, but also as a failure to provide an educational service of proper quality.

Second, the post-war period requires specific mechanisms for protecting the rights of veteran learners and combatants returning to education. Academic reintegration should include the right to academic leave for mental health reasons, especially in cases of PTSD aggravation or the need for long-term psychological rehabilitation. It should also include flexible assessment methods based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning. For learners who have cognitive consequences of blast injuries, such as impaired concentration, memory, or attention, the possibility of choosing the form of assessment, whether written, oral, project-based, or presentation-based, should be considered not as a privilege but as a compensatory mechanism for ensuring equal opportunities.

Third, digital rights should be recognized as a separate area of inclusive policy. During the war, digitalization became a primary condition for the realization of the right to education for many learners. In the post-war period, this experience should be transformed into a legal standard. Educational content that does not meet accessibility requirements, including WCAG 2.1 and EN 301 549, may reproduce digital discrimination by excluding learners with visual, hearing, motor, or cognitive impairments from full participation in the educational process. Therefore, the status of a digital assistant should be legally defined. Such a specialist would support learners with severe visual or motor impairments in interacting with university electronic systems, learning platforms, digital libraries, and administrative services.

Fourth, the institutional model of post-war inclusion should include Veteran Hubs or Offices of Inclusive Support operating on the principle of a “single window.” These units should coordinate social support, psychological assistance, legal counseling, academic adaptation, career navigation, and communication with external partners. Their work should also include support for the right to the first workplace through cooperation with employers, quota-based mechanisms, or incentives for university partners who employ veteran graduates or persons with disabilities.

Fifth, post-war reconstruction of higher education institutions should be guided by the principle of Build Back Better. Any national or international assistance aimed at restoring university infrastructure should pass through an “inclusive filter.” This means that reconstructed academic buildings, dormitories, shelters, libraries, laboratories, and digital infrastructure should be assessed not only for physical restoration but also for accessibility and universal design. The participation of representatives of public organizations of persons with disabilities in commissions responsible for accepting reconstructed facilities into operation should become mandatory. In addition, an Accessibility Passport for each educational facility may serve as a practical instrument for documenting compliance with accessibility requirements and as a condition for obtaining or maintaining a license for educational activity in the post-war period.

Thus, the post-war expansion of reasonable accommodation transforms inclusion from a set of compensatory measures into a broader institutional obligation that covers safety, digital rights, veteran reintegration, psychological support, and accessible reconstruction. Under such conditions, inclusive-institutional development becomes not only a requirement of European integration but also a mechanism for restoring trust, dignity, and social participation within the Ukrainian academic community.

Conclusions

The study of the formation of inclusive institutional educational development in Ukraine’s context of European integration yields several conceptual conclusions.

The analysis has shown a fundamental change in the regulatory paradigm of higher education. The current stage of its development is characterized by a transition from the medical model of disability to the social-institutional and rights-based model. Inclusion is no longer interpreted as an act of charity, isolated support, or the goodwill of a higher education institution. It is becoming a legal and institutional requirement in educational environments that they be accessible, flexible, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of every learner.

The harmonization of Ukrainian higher education with the European legal framework is becoming a strategic condition for its modernization. The analysis of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Directive 2000/78/EC, Directive (EU) 2016/2102, Directive (EU) 2019/882, the Rome Communiqué, the ESG, and the National Strategy until 2029 shows that inclusiveness is becoming an imperative condition for the functioning of higher education institutions. The implementation of reasonable accommodation, universal design, the social dimension of higher education, and accessibility standards creates a legal roadmap for Ukraine's integration into the European Higher Education Area.

Digital accessibility has become a technical and administrative requirement. In distance and blended learning settings, digital inclusion cannot be reduced to the use of digital platforms. It requires access to websites, mobile applications, LMS platforms, electronic libraries, e-books, video materials, tests, and administrative digital services. Compliance with WCAG and EN 301 549 should be incorporated into the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. In this regard, digital accessibility should be understood as a technical condition for participation, whereas digital inclusion should be considered a broader process that ensures learners' real involvement, autonomy, and support in the digital educational environment.

The study confirms that institutional responsibility and control mechanisms in the field of inclusion have been strengthened. Inclusiveness has become a determinant of the legitimacy of educational activity through accreditation procedures, quality assurance standards, and compliance with the State Building Standards of Ukraine. The combination of NAQA accreditation requirements and technical regulation creates a double framework of responsibility for higher education institutions: academic responsibility for inclusive educational resources and administrative responsibility for the accessibility and safety of physical infrastructure.

The analysis of European support models demonstrates the need to move away from institutionalized, average-based funding toward more personalized financial mechanisms. The British Disabled Students' Allowance and the Polish disability-grant model

show that support becomes more effective when it is linked either to the individual needs of the learner or to targeted institutional incentives. For Ukraine, the further development of inclusive higher education requires a gradual transition toward the principle that funding follows the learner, together with the legal recognition of assistants, digital support specialists, and personalized support services.

The post-war development of Ukrainian higher education requires expanding the concept of reasonable accommodation. Under wartime and post-war conditions, reasonable accommodation should include not only architectural accessibility, academic adaptation, and flexible assessment, but also inclusive safety, accessible shelters, veteran reintegration, academic leave for mental health reasons, assistive digital support, and trauma-informed educational practices. Veteran Hubs or Offices of Inclusive Support may serve as institutional mechanisms for coordinating psychological, legal, academic, and career-related support for learners affected by war.

Post-war reconstruction should be guided by the principle of Build Back Better and by the requirement of an inclusive filter for all restored educational infrastructure. Accessibility should be considered not as an additional option after reconstruction, but as a mandatory condition of educational quality, licensing, and public accountability. The introduction of Accessibility Passports for educational facilities and the involvement of representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities in the evaluation of reconstructed buildings would strengthen the practical implementation of universal design.

Thus, the formation of an inclusive institutional model of higher education in Ukraine is an irreversible process that requires synergy among legal norms, institutional responsibility, financial mechanisms, digital standards, safety requirements, and psychosocial support. In the context of European integration and post-war recovery, inclusion becomes not only an educational priority but also a criterion of the democratic, human-centered, and socially responsible development of Ukrainian higher education. The right to education can be considered fully realized only when barriers are not merely declared, but systematically

identified, removed, and prevented through coordinated legal, organizational, technological, and pedagogical mechanisms.

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