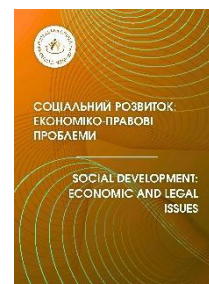




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European Standards in the Field of Social Protection and Their Implementation in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The study's relevance stems from the urgent need to harmonize Ukrainian legislation with European social protection standards in the context of European integration and post-war reconstruction. Ukraine, as a candidate for EU accession, faces challenges including low levels of social benefits, gender inequality, and insufficient guarantees for vulnerable groups, which are exacerbated by the protracted war, economic crisis, demographic shifts, and institutional weaknesses such as corruption and fragmented governance. The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative legal analysis of European social protection standards, assess their implementation in Ukrainian legislation, and identify ways to improve the national regulatory framework in the context of European integration. The analysis of key European standards, including the European Social Charter (revised in 1996) and EU directives, highlights their emphasis on the principles of equality, solidarity and dignity, covering pensions, social assistance, working conditions and protection of vulnerable groups, with monitoring through the European Committee of Social Rights and the European Semester. Ukrainian legislation is in the process of active alignment with the European Union (EU) acquis. The main obstacles to this process are financial constraints, institutional barriers, adverse external factors and political challenges. To accelerate the harmonization of Ukrainian legislation, it is necessary to carry out legislative reforms to align with EU directives, increase financing for social programs while reducing dependence on state budget subsidies, and implement institutional reforms. Future research should focus on empirical assessments of the post-war implementation of European social protection standards to ensure sustainable social protection.

KEYWORDS

European standards, social protection, implementation, European integration, post-war recovery, harmonization, labor legislation, pension provision, unemployment.



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Європейські стандарти у сфері соціального захисту та їх імплементація в Україні

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Актуальність дослідження обумовлена нагальною потребою узгодження українського законодавства з європейськими стандартами соціального захисту в умовах європейської інтеграції і післявоєнної відбудови. Україна, як кандидат на вступ до ЄС, стикається з такими викликами, як низький рівень соціальних виплат, гендерна нерівність та недостатні гарантії для вразливих груп населення, що посилюються тривалою війною, економічною кризою, демографічними зрушеннями та інституційними слабкостями, такими як корупція та фрагментоване управління. Метою цього дослідження є проведення порівняльно-правового аналізу європейських стандартів соціального захисту та оцінка їх впровадження в українському законодавстві, з метою визначення шляхів удосконалення національної нормативно-правової бази в контексті євроінтеграції. У результатах аналізу ключових європейських стандартів, включаючи Європейську соціальну хартію (переглянуту 1996 року) та директиви ЄС, підкреслюється їхній акцент на принципах рівності, солідарності та гідності, що охоплюють пенсії, соціальну допомогу, умови праці та захист вразливих груп, з моніторингом через Європейський комітет соціальних прав та Європейський семестр. Українське законодавство перебуває у фазі активного узгодження з правовими нормами Європейського Союзу (ЄС). Головними перешкодами цього процесу є фінансові обмеження, інституційні бар'єри, несприятливі зовнішні чинники та політичні виклики. Для прискорення гармонізації українського законодавства необхідне проведення законодавчих реформ для узгодження з директивами ЄС, збільшення фінансування соціальних програм із одночасним зменшенням залежності від субсидій із державного бюджету та здійснення інституційних реформ. Майбутні дослідження повинні зосередитися на емпіричних оцінках післявоєнного впровадження європейських стандартів у сфері соціального захисту для забезпечення сталого соціального захисту.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

європейські стандарти, соціальний захист, імплементація, євроінтеграція, поствоєнне відновлення, гармонізація, трудове законодавство, пенсійне забезпечення, безробіття.

1. Introduction

Social protection, aimed at minimizing the risks of poverty, unemployment, disease and old age, is one of the key components of a sustainable society in today's world. The European Union (hereinafter referred to as the EU) has introduced a developed system of regulations in the social sphere, which is based on the principles of solidarity, equality and social justice. The fundamental normative acts are the European Social Charter of 1961 (revised in 1996) [1] and the European Pillar of Social Rights of 2017 [2], which enshrine guaranteed minimum standards covering access to social security, equality in benefits and protection of vulnerable groups. The standards implemented in the EU countries are aimed at maintaining macroeconomic stability and are a tool for reducing social inequality. According to Eurostat, in 2024, the share of the population that could face the risk of poverty was about 21.0%. At the same time, the highest level of 30.3% was recorded in Bulgaria, while the lowest was recorded in the Czech Republic, where it was 11.3% [3]. The introduction of European standards of social protection is critically necessary for Ukraine, which strives for full integration into the European space. Social protection reform is an important part of European integration, but this process has slowed down due to difficulties caused by the economic crisis, Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, and demographic changes, including population decline. Under the 2014 Association Agreement with the EU, Ukraine has committed itself to aligning its legislation with European standards, but progress in this area remains uneven, underscoring the importance of careful assessment.

The problem is that due to discrepancies in the existing Ukrainian legislation, European standards of social protection cannot be fully implemented in Ukraine. All this is further complicated by the existing differences in the principles of building national and European legal systems. European standards provide for clear mechanisms for the implementation of social guarantees and financial security, while compliance with some norms of Ukrainian legislation cannot be fulfilled due to the limitation of available funding opportunities. When it comes to how broad social rights are, in the EU the priority is to ensure equality and non-discrimination, while in Ukraine, corruption, weak state institutions and weak law enforcement hinder the achievement of these priorities. Insufficient consistency of procedures for controlling and monitoring the quality of social services is also a significant problem. In addition, the national system lags behind the European model in terms of modern instruments of social dialogue and partnership. As a result, the adaptation process requires not only harmonization of legislation, but also a revision of the conceptual foundations of social policy.

2. Literature Review

Analyzing the current state of research in the field of social security standards, the authors aimed to systematize the existing developments on European standards of social security and their implementation in Ukraine, which will help to identify key theoretical approaches and practical problems. This review will identify scientific gaps that need to be eliminated in the context of Ukraine's European integration, as well as outline promising areas for further research, in particular in the field of comparing national legislation with EU legislation. In general, the analysis of publications confirms that this topic is actively researched by Ukrainian scholars, but it should be noted that there is a certain lack of comprehensive comparative studies focused on post-war realities, digitalization of social services, and the impact of global crises such as pandemics or migration.

European social security standards. The article by I. Shumliaeva defines the place of social human rights in the general system of rights with an emphasis on their role as a minimum standard for ensuring decent living conditions. The researcher analyzed European social acts that enshrine rights and guarantees related to access to quality public services, education, healthcare, social protection, housing, employment and the rights of social minorities, paying special attention to the monitoring mechanisms of the European Committee of Social Rights through collective complaints and reporting systems. The result of the study was the proposals developed for Ukraine on the implementation of comprehensive and gradual measures to build an internal system for ensuring social human rights [4].

In turn, L. Nalyvaiko focuses on European standards of the right to social protection, considering them as an evolutionary process based on the principles of dignity, equality and solidarity. The author analyzes sources, including the European Social Charter, acts of the International Labor Organization

(ILO), and the practice of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), emphasizing the legally binding nature of these norms. The study has a deep integration of judicial practice, for example, the ECtHR judgment on social rights, which adds a critical dimension [5].

The object of N. Cherevko's research was the European Social Charter (revised), namely the analysis of its history and principles, such as equality, social justice and protection of vulnerable groups. The researcher focused on the mechanisms of implementation in the Council of Europe and partial ratification by Ukraine, offering recommendations for full implementation [6].

Implementation in post-Soviet countries and the EU experience. The issue raised in L. Nalyvaiko's research acquires special importance in the light of the latest transformations in the post-Soviet space. The scientist emphasizes that one of the main obstacles to the implementation of European social standards in post-Soviet countries is insufficient institutional capacity [5].

Important for understanding the problem is the research of S. Synchuk and O. Rym, who analyzed European standards for displaced persons from Ukraine, focusing on the standards of temporary protection in the EU (Directive 2001/55/EC) and the Council of Europe. It is worth noting the criticism of the double standards of asylum (European vs. non-European) and the proposal of cooperation through the "Solidarity Platform" of the European Union [7]. This work is of a practical nature, focusing on monitoring mechanisms and children's rights.

A comparative analysis of the systems of protection of social rights in Ukraine and the EU was made by O. Savchuk et al., focusing on the regulatory framework (European Social Charter, EU-Ukraine Association Agreement) and implementation mechanisms [8]. Scientists focus on the importance of maintaining an optimal level of implementation of social rights, in particular in the context of pandemic challenges, as well as ensuring the protection of social rights of persons belonging to hostilities.

Valuable for understanding the topic is the scientific research of V. Zhuravel et al., where social security in the context of European integration was studied and an analysis of the EU's influence on Ukrainian social policy and problems was carried out. The results include proposals for reform for harmonization with international standards [9].

Specifics of Ukraine. Certain aspects, namely financial, legal and organizational support of social protection in the context of European integration, were studied by E. Dmytrenko and Y. Dmytrenko, highlighting the problems of budgeting, for example, the deficit of the Pension Fund and the imbalance between the obligations of the state and financial capabilities. The authors proposed amendments to the current legislation in order to implement EU standards, namely the expansion of the powers of local authorities [10].

The evolution of social standards in Ukraine from the Soviet period to European integration was considered by I. Nalyvaiko, focusing on the impact of the ILO and the European Social Charter. The study highlights the challenges for vulnerable groups (pensioners, IDPs) and provides proposals for reform to ensure the resilience of the system. An interesting aspect was the analysis of the historical context, which is relevant for modern Ukraine [11].

The issue of the system of protection of vulnerable segments of the population, raised in the article by T. Pavliuk and I. Yurchyk, acquires special importance in modern conditions. Analyzing the mechanisms of payments and social policy, the scientists emphasized the role of the state in regulating the subsistence minimum [12].

In the article by Y. Alimenko et al., an analysis of the possibilities of adapting the labor legislation of Ukraine to European standards of social security with an emphasis on harmonization with EU norms, is carried out. A valuable result of the study was the proposals for strengthening social guarantees [13].

V. Heyets et al. highlighted the possibilities of Ukraine's recovery through the prism of social quality, focusing on the post-war development of the socio-economic sphere on the principles of social cohesion, inclusion and ecological balance. Scientists propose a model based on social quality for a balance between security and development [14].

Thus, the analyzed scientific publications confirm some progress in the study of the problem. However, it should be noted that there is a certain lack of research devoted to the identification of obstacles to the harmonization of Ukrainian legislation with European standards of social protection in modern conditions. This article fills this gap through systematic comparative legal analysis by offering recommendations for the harmonization of national legislation with EU standards.

3. Problem Statement

Taking into account the above-mentioned scientific gaps, there is an objective need to conduct a comprehensive comparative legal study of the prospects for the implementation of European standards of social protection in Ukraine, taking into account post-war realities, digitalization of social services, migration crises and the impact of global challenges.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to conduct a comparative legal analysis of European standards in the field of social protection and assess the prospects for their implementation in Ukrainian legislation to identify ways to improve the national system in the context of European integration.

To achieve the goal of the study, the following tasks were set:

1. To analyze key European standards of social protection, in particular EU directives and the European Social Charter.
2. To study the relevant regulatory legal acts of Ukraine in the field of social protection.
3. Compare EU and Ukrainian norms and identify potential obstacles to implementation.

4. Methods and Materials

The main method on which the study was based was comparative legal analysis, which made it possible to compare the legal systems of the EU and Ukraine in the field of social protection according to key criteria: legal architectonics, content of norms, effectiveness of implementation and impact on social protection of vulnerable groups of the population. The application of this method made it possible to identify coincidences, discrepancies and gaps in national legislation, which contributed to the assessment of the prospects for its harmonization with EU standards. The following methods were also used: formal-legal – for a detailed analysis of the texts of normative acts; historical – to study the evolution of standards; systemic – to analyze the relationships between the elements of social protection; dialectical – to assess the dynamics of changes in national legislation under the influence of European integration processes.

The study was carried out in three stages, which corresponded to the tasks. At the first stage, the key aspects of the comparison were identified, reflecting the main areas of social protection in European standards and Ukrainian legislation: pension provision, social assistance and inclusion, working conditions and employment, as well as protection of special groups of the population. At the second stage, a comparative legal analysis of the compliance of the EU and Ukrainian norms was carried out, with the systematization of the results in the form of a table highlighting the discrepancies. At the third stage, the prospects for the implementation of European standards in Ukraine were assessed, taking into account the identified obstacles, such as budget deficit, administrative fragmentation, martial law and political challenges.

5. Results and Discussion

Using economic, legal and humanitarian elements, European standards of social protection create a fundamental basis for ensuring social justice and human dignity within the European Union. In the EU member states, social protection is seen as a means of reducing inequality, supporting vulnerable groups and ensuring sustainable development. The analysis of important components, in particular the directives of the European Union and the European Social Charter, shows their role in the formation of common rules. Such standards combine general principles with mechanisms for adaptation to national legislation. They are especially important in the face of global challenges, such as demographic changes and economic crises, as they not only declare rights, but also provide ways to implement and monitor them.

The European Pillar of Social Rights [2], which was approved in 2017, plays a key role in shaping the EU's social policy. It consists of twenty basic principles and is divided into three main themes: equal opportunities and access to the labor market, fair working conditions and social protection with inclusion. The principles laid down in this document are the strategic basis for the development of EU Directives. The EU's social protection directives provide a legal framework that helps Member States align their policies with a focus on equality, inclusion and accessibility of social services. Directive 2019/1152 [15] on transparent and predictable working conditions strengthens the protection of

workers against precarious employment through contract disclosure requirements and limitations on probationary periods. Similarly, Directive 2000/43/EC [16] on equality on racial or ethnic grounds prohibits discrimination in various areas, such as social protection, ensuring that ethnic minorities receive equal benefits. Directive 79/7/EC [17] establishes the principle of gender equality in social security systems and aims to eliminate gender discrimination in pension programs and benefits. In turn, Directive 2022/2041 [18] on adequate minimum wages emphasizes the economic dimension of social protection in the fight against poverty by setting minimum wage standards that affect social benefits. Monitoring of the effectiveness of national social reforms, which assesses indicators such as the level of poverty risk and employment, is carried out within the framework of the European Semester using the European Pillar of Social Rights as an analytical framework, while the European Committee of Social Rights (ESPOO) provides supervision over the implementation of the obligations of the European Social Charter.

The European Social Charter [1] was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1961 and revised in 1996. This document expands the EU's strategy by focusing on economic and social rights as a complement to the civil and political rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. The Charter provides a wide range of rights in the areas of employment, health, education, housing and social protection. Particular emphasis is placed on non-discrimination and the protection of vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and migrants. The document contains detailed rules relating to the right to social security, including the right to adequate compensation in the event of unemployment, illness, or old age, as well as the right to health, which provides access to health services and preventive measures. In the area of employment, the Charter ensures fair working conditions, including restrictions on working hours and protection against unreasonable dismissals. The European Committee of Social Rights conducts monitoring, which includes the analysis of national reports of the participating states and the receipt of collective complaints from organizations. This makes it possible to assess the compliance of legislation with the provisions of the Charter. Such a mechanism facilitates dialogue between states and civil society, which distinguishes it from the judiciary. The revised version of the Charter expanded the rights to include elements of gender equality and protection of families. This makes it a tool for adapting social systems to modern problems, such as the cost-of-living crisis.

The difference between the European Directives and the European Social Charter is that the former guarantees implementation in European Union law, while the latter provides a broader ethical and legal standard for all European states, including non-EU members. These instruments contributed to the formation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union [19], which combines social standards with the constitutional level. However, challenges such as fragmentation of national systems and economic imbalances require increased coordination, in particular through common indicators and funding from EU funds, such as the European Social Fund.

The comprehensive system of legal norms that constitutes social protection in Ukraine is aimed at ensuring a decent standard of living for citizens, especially vulnerable groups of the population, through the mechanisms of pension provision, state assistance, mandatory state social insurance, and social services. This mechanism is based on Article 46 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which guarantees the right to social protection, which includes the right to security in case of full, partial, or temporary disability, loss of breadwinner, unemployment due to circumstances beyond the recipient's control, as well as in old age and in other cases provided for by law [20]. The evolution of legislation indicates the transition from post-Soviet standards to European ones. This process focuses on integration and resilience in the context of economic reforms, demographic changes and active hostilities. The analysis of the regulatory framework shows its hierarchical structure, where special laws and by-laws complement the constitutional provisions, balancing between general guarantees and targeted assistance.

Pension provision is one of the main components of social protection in Ukraine. It is regulated by a number of laws that establish the combination of compulsory insurance with state benefits. The Law of Ukraine "On Compulsory State Pension Insurance" No. 1058-IV of July 9, 2003, defines a three-tier system of pension provision. The first level is the solidarity system, which is based on the principles of solidarity and subsidies and ensures the payment of pensions at the expense of the Pension Fund (system of immediate payments). The second level (not yet operating in Ukraine) is the accumulation system, which provides for the formation of individual pension savings in the Accumulation Fund or

non-state pension funds. The third level is the system of non-state pension provision, which is based on the principle of voluntary participation of citizens and employers in the creation of individual pension savings. At the same time, the mentioned law defines the minimum guarantees in the field of pension provision and establishes special conditions for the provision of pensions to certain categories of citizens. In addition, other regulations regulate special conditions of pension provision, in particular the Law of Ukraine "On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Certain Other Persons". The Law "On Collection and Accounting of the Single Contribution to Compulsory State Social Insurance" No. 2464-VI of July 8, 2010, unifies the mechanisms of financing social insurance in order to increase the transparency and efficiency of collection, accounting and use of funds in this system.

State social assistance in Ukraine functions as a mechanism of targeted support, aimed mainly at providing socially vulnerable segments of the population who, due to circumstances beyond their control, have an income below the established social standards. In particular, the Law of Ukraine "On State Social Assistance to Low-Income Families" No. 1768-III of June 1, 2000 is aimed at reducing the level of poverty and provides for a combination of two mechanisms – the provision of monthly cash payments to low-income families (taking into account the subsistence minimum and the average monthly income of the family) and the implementation of measures that contribute to the economic independence of recipients. Similarly, the Law of Ukraine "On State Social Assistance to Persons Not Entitled to a Pension and Persons with Disabilities" No. 1723-IV of May 18, 2004 regulates the provision of assistance to persons who have reached the age of 65 or have a disability, but have not acquired the right to pension provision. The amount of assistance is determined by taking into account their income and other criteria. It should be noted that the system of state social assistance operates on the basis of a set of normative legal acts regulating various types of social benefits. This legal framework includes, in particular, the Law of Ukraine "On State Social Assistance to Persons with Disabilities from Childhood and Children with Disabilities" No. 2109-III of November 16, 2000, the Law of Ukraine "On State Assistance to Families with Children" No. 2811-XII of November 21, 1992, as well as by-laws detailing the procedures for appointment and payment. Since July 1, a new type of social benefits has appeared in Ukraine – basic social assistance, which consolidated five types of state social benefits into a single payment. The amount of assistance is determined individually as the difference between the total amount of the basic amount for each family member and the average monthly total income of the family. At the same time, the size of the base value is 4500 hryvnias. Such unification of social benefits ensures an increase in efficiency, targeting and transparency in the distribution of state resources.

Protection of vulnerable groups of the population in Ukraine is also implemented through the system of social benefits and services, the conditions, volumes and procedure for the provision of which are regulated by several regulatory legal acts. In particular, the Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of Their Social Protection" No. 3551-XII of October 22, 1993 provides for the provision of several benefits to veterans, including free medical care, housing subsidies and pension allowances. Similarly, the Law of Ukraine "On the Status and Social Protection of Citizens Affected by the Chornobyl Catastrophe" No. 796-XII of February 28, 1991 regulates the provision of compensation and benefits to persons with the appropriate status, in particular in the areas of medical care, housing and communal services, social and labor relations, etc. The Law of Ukraine "On the Basics of Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine" No. 875-XII of March 21, 1991, defines the principles of integration of persons with disabilities into society, providing access to education, employment, medical services and social guarantees. Under martial law and the ongoing armed aggression of the Russian Federation, the regulatory framework is expanding and improving. In particular, in 2014, the Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons" No. 1706-VII of October 20, 2014, came into force, which enshrines guarantees for the implementation of the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons, including the sphere of social protection. The Law of Ukraine "On Social and Legal Protection of Persons Who Have Been Deprived of Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine and Members of Their Families" No. 2010-IX of January 26, 2022 establishes mechanisms for legal assistance, medical rehabilitation and monetary compensation for persons in respect of whom the fact of deprivation of personal liberty as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as for members of their families, has been established.

The organizational and legal basis for the provision of social services is determined by the Law of Ukraine "On Social Services" No. 2671-VIII of January 17, 2019. This regulation establishes standards for the provision of services such as home care, social adaptation and support for families in crises, with

an emphasis on deinstitutionalization and the development of public initiatives, positioning social services as a dynamic element of the overall protection system. By-laws, such as the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On the Organization of the Provision of Social Services” No. 587 of June 1, 2020, ensure the practical implementation of these norms at the local level, detailing procedures, financing mechanisms and supervision of implementation.

An integral component of the European integration process is the alignment of the standards of social protection of Ukraine with the EU requirements, which provides for the harmonization of national legislation with the *acquis communautaire*. A comparison of Ukraine’s current legislation in the field of social protection with EU standards shows a certain degree of compliance, as Ukraine has made progress in basic guarantees, but there are still some differences on implementation and coverage mechanisms. The discrepancy analysis carried out, which is presented in Table 1, concerned the basic principles of social protection, with special emphasis on possible obstacles to implementation related to financial, institutional and external factors.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of social protection standards in Ukraine and the EU

Aspect of social protection	EU norms and the European Social Charter	Norms of Ukraine	Comparisons and differences
Pension provision	<p>The European Social Charter [1] guarantees the right to social security, including adequate old-age, disability or survivor’s pensions, with indexation, non-discrimination and coordination mechanisms between Member States to ensure the mobility of workers. Monitoring through the European Committee of Social Rights ensures compliance with recommendations for indexing payments according to inflation and economic indicators. Directive 79/7/EC [17] establishes the principle of gender equality in social security systems and aims to eliminate discrimination, exclusively with discrimination based on sex in pension programs and benefits. The European Pillar of Social Rights [1] emphasizes minimum guarantees for decent old age, including universal access to pension schemes with elements of savings and protection against poverty in old age.</p>	<p>National legislation is based on the Constitution of Ukraine and defines a three-tier system of pension provision (Laws of Ukraine “On Compulsory State Pension Insurance”, “On Non-State Pension Provision”). However, this system does not work fully because the second layer has not yet been implemented. At the same time, regulations regulate special conditions of pension provision for certain categories (Laws of Ukraine “On Pension Provision for Persons Discharged from Military Service and Certain Other Persons”, “On the Status and Social Protection of Citizens Affected by the Chornobyl Catastrophe”, etc.) Preferential conditions for retirement provided for by Chapter XIV-1 of the Law of Ukraine “On Compulsory State Pension Insurance”. At the constitutional level, it is determined that pensions, other types of social payments and benefits, which are the main means of subsistence, must ensure a standard of living not less than the subsistence minimum.</p>	<p>EU legal acts aim to ensure universal accessibility, gender equality and coordination of systems for mobility, with a focus on preventive mechanisms against poverty in old age through mandatory accumulation elements and indexation. Ukrainian legislation focuses on the length of service and payment of the USC and stimulates official employment. Difference in funding. The EU provides for wider coordination through funds (e.g., the European Social Fund) and less dependence on the state budget. The Ukrainian pension system, especially under martial law, needs additional funding through transfers from the state budget and the support of international partners. The system of preferential pensions in Ukraine causes the fragmentation of the pension system and the uneven implementation of rights in this area. This contrasts with the European Union’s universal approach, which is focused on ensuring equality and fairness without excessive exceptions.</p>
Social Assistance and Inclusion	<p>The European Social Charter [1] provides the right to social and health assistance to prevent poverty, with a focus on the poor and vulnerable groups, including minimum guarantees of assistance without discrimination (Article 30 – protection from poverty and social exclusion through</p>	<p>The system of state social assistance in Ukraine is regulated by a set of special regulations that provide targeted support to vulnerable categories of the population and promote social inclusion. The Law of Ukraine “On State Social Assistance to Low-Income Families” defines a mechanism that combines the provision of monthly cash payments based on the subsistence</p>	<p>Both systems are aimed at ensuring a basic standard of living and social inclusion of vulnerable categories of people. The EU emphasizes preventive mechanisms and anti-discrimination, with higher minimum standards of assistance, while Ukraine focuses on targeted</p>

Aspect of social protection	EU norms and the European Social Charter	Norms of Ukraine	Comparisons and differences
	comprehensive integration measures). Directive 2000/43/EC [16] prohibits discrimination based on race or ethnicity in access to assistance, guaranteeing equal benefits for ethnic minorities. Principle 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights [2] emphasizes the inclusion of persons with disabilities through rehabilitation, access to education and employment, with preventive mechanisms.	minimum and measures to stimulate the employment, economic independence and social activity of recipients. The Law of Ukraine "On State Assistance to Families with Children" defines the following types of state support: in connection with pregnancy and childbirth, at the birth of a child, single mothers, children under guardianship and care, children with serious illnesses. Cash payments are part of a comprehensive state program to support families with children, which has recently been implemented in Ukraine. A special place in the system of social guarantees is occupied by norms aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The Law of Ukraine "On the Basics of Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine" defines the principles of equal opportunities in access to education, medical services, and employment (in particular, through job quotas). The Laws of Ukraine "On State Social Assistance to Persons Who Are Not Entitled to a Pension and Persons with Disabilities", "On State Social Assistance to Persons with Disabilities from Childhood and Children with Disabilities", "On Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine" are also of great importance, which provide a comprehensive approach to the implementation of the rights of not only persons with disabilities, but also citizens of the elderly, which ensures their social integration, ensuring equal opportunities in society.	assistance. The difference is in inclusion. In the EU legal system, the emphasis is on a comprehensive approach, which is designed to ensure the achievement of maximum autonomy and an independent lifestyle. There is proper legal regulation in Ukraine, but there is a need for further development of the institutional and resource component, in particular in the system of support for persons with disabilities. Introduction of basic social assistance in Ukraine (consolidation of individual social benefits in 2025) is aimed at the formation of a holistic and targeted system of social protection, which provides minimum standards of well-being and contributes to the reduction of social inequality. The implementation of this pilot project is in line with the European trend of unification of social standards and the desire for transition to effective, transparent social protection systems.
Working conditions and employment	The European Social Charter [1] establishes the right to safe and healthy working conditions, including restrictions on working hours, and fair remuneration sufficient for a dignified life. Directive 2019/1152 [15] requires contract transparency and protection against precarious employment. Directive 2022/2041 [18] establishes adequate minimum wages, with collective agreements to combat poverty.	The Constitution of Ukraine (Article 43) guarantees the right to work without discrimination. The Labor Code defines the legal basis for regulating labor relations, in particular, regulates the procedure for terminating an employment contract, including mandatory warning and payment of compensation, as well as establishes guarantees in the field of remuneration, rationing of working hours (in particular, limits the working week to 40 hours), provides additional protection for certain categories of employees. The Law of Ukraine "On Remuneration of Labor" defines state guarantees of remuneration of employees in the economic, legal and organizational planes, including the establishment of a minimum wage and the prohibition of discrimination.	Both systems guarantee the right to work, safe working conditions and decent treatment. The EU focuses on predictability and gender/age equality in pay through collective agreements with higher standards, while Ukraine provides basic guarantees but with weaker protection against precarious employment. The difference: the EU has stronger monitoring mechanisms (through the European semester), Ukraine needs reforms for harmonization, especially under martial law.
Protection of special categories of the population	The European Social Charter [1] protects older persons through access to services, social assistance and participation in society; employees with family	The legal framework of Ukraine in this area includes a set of special laws that provide differentiated support to vulnerable groups of the population. In particular, the Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans,	The EU integrates rights into a universal framework for all special groups, with a focus on inclusion and prevention, while Ukraine uses specialized laws for

Aspect of social protection	EU norms and the European Social Charter	Norms of Ukraine	Comparisons and differences
	responsibilities – through equal opportunities. Directive 2000/43/EC [16] extends anti-discrimination to ethnic minorities and migrants in access to services.	<p>Guarantees of Their Social Protection” establishes a system of benefits for combatants, persons with disabilities as a result of war, war participants and other categories of persons subject to this law. The Law of Ukraine “On the Status and Social Protection of Citizens Affected by the Chornobyl Catastrophe” defines the legal mechanisms for providing compensation, providing sanatorium-resort treatment, and assigning early pensions for persons who suffered damage as a result of radiation pollution. In the field of protection of internally displaced persons, the Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons” is in force, which provides for state support through housing programs, social benefits, and ensuring the implementation of the right to employment. The Law of Ukraine “On the Basics of Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine” establishes the key principles of social integration of persons with disabilities, determines the features of material, social and medical support. The legal status of persons in respect of whom the fact of deprivation of personal liberty as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine and members of their families has been established and the guarantees of their social protection is regulated by the Law of Ukraine “On Social and Legal Protection of Persons in Respect of Whom the Fact of Deprivation of Personal Liberty as a Result of Armed Aggression against Ukraine and Members of Their Families Has Been Established”.</p> <p>An important role in the formation of a unified system of social support is played by the Law of Ukraine “On Social Services”, which defines the principles, procedure and conditions for the provision of various types of social services to persons who belong to vulnerable groups of the population and/or are in difficult life circumstances.</p>	<p>historical groups (veterans, Chernobyl survivors, IDPs), which provides targeted support (subsidies, compensations) but leads to fragmentation (different procedures for groups) and less focus on ethnic minorities or migrants. The difference: the EU requires comprehensive integration (through quotas and anti-discrimination), Ukraine requires reactive assistance, but bureaucracy and corruption reduce efficiency, unlike monitoring in the EU. Deinstitutionalization in Ukraine (since 2019) is similar to the EU, but its speed is limited by funding opportunities.</p>

Source: Authors' own development.

Potential obstacles to the implementation of European norms in Ukrainian legislation include financial constraints as Ukraine faces a budget deficit due to the war and economic crisis, making it difficult to raise minimum standards as required by Directive 2022/2041. Institutional barriers manifest themselves in administrative fragmentation and corruption, which hinder effective monitoring, similar to the model used by the European Committee of Social Rights. This requires structural reforms of the system of social protection bodies, both at the central and local levels. External factors, such as martial law, lead to the postponement of reforms. This, in particular, applies to adaptation to the European Social Charter, which Ukraine ratified on December 21, 2006, acceding to 74 out of 98 points of the document.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of key European standards in the field of social protection has demonstrated that they establish a mandatory legal framework for the harmonization of national policies, focusing on universal accessibility, non-discrimination and preventive mechanisms. The European Social Charter (revised in 1996) complements the social protection mechanism by guaranteeing rights in the areas of employment, social security and protection of vulnerable groups, with monitoring through the European Committee of Social Rights.

The result of the study of Ukrainian legislation in the field of social protection demonstrates its multi-level and hierarchical structure. In this system, the Constitution of Ukraine forms the fundamental foundations, enshrining constitutional guarantees of the rights to pensions, unemployment benefits and in case of disability. These provisions are specified and developed in the system of special laws and by-laws, which constitute a multi-level mechanism for the implementation of state social guarantees.

A comparison of the current EU norms and the legislation of Ukraine showed partial compliance with the latter, but with significant differences. Thus, in pension provision, the EU emphasizes universality and gender equality, in particular through the elimination of gender discrimination in access to most benefits and the coordination of systems for employee mobility. In Ukraine, gender inequality in the retirement age has been eliminated, and the pension depends on the length of service and contributions. However, the national pension system retains a significant number of special (preferential) regimes for certain categories of citizens, which leads to fragmentation and deviation from the universal model typical for the EU countries.

In the field of social assistance and inclusion, EU policy focuses mainly on poverty prevention and social inclusion, while in Ukraine, the emphasis is on the provision of targeted support, which may be accompanied by excessive administrative procedures (within the framework of non-digitalized services). At the same time, the implementation of the pilot project on the introduction of basic social assistance is consistent with the European trend of unification of social standards and reflects the desire of the state to move to a more effective and transparent social protection system.

To protect working conditions, the EU requires transparency of employment contracts and high minimum wages, while Ukrainian legislation, although it provides basic guarantees for workers, weakly protects against precarious employment. In the protection of special groups, the EU integrates a universal approach, while Ukraine integrates a fragmented one through special laws, with less emphasis on migrants. The identified obstacles to the implementation of European standards in the field of social protection in Ukraine include financial constraints due to the war and a significant budget deficit; weak institutions due to administrative fragmentation, which hinders effective monitoring; external factors due to the ongoing martial law and international political instability; and political fears of unpopular reforms.

To accelerate the harmonization of Ukrainian legislation, the following priorities should be established: 1) legislative reforms to align with EU directives, in particular in the field of gender equality and social inclusion; 2) optimization of financing of social programs through diversification of sources, with an emphasis on reducing dependence on direct budget subsidies through active attraction of grants from EU funds, international assistance and reforming the system of social contributions to increase the self-sufficiency of funds; 3) implementation of institutional reforms, further digitalization of the social sphere, as well as active fight against corruption through the introduction of anti-corruption monitoring mechanisms. Future research should focus on empirical assessments of the post-war implementation of European standards in the field of social protection to ensure sustainable social protection.

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