

**INEQUALITY IN THE ACCESS OF THE UKRAINIAN POPULATION TO SOCIAL SERVICES: FACTORS, TRENDS AND CONSEQUENCES**

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**Abstract:** *The article details the problem of unequal access of the Ukrainian population to social services, presents assessment of its scale, components, manifestations and implications. The social-economic inequality is examined through the prism of political influences and on this basis the comprehensive approach toward overcoming such inequality in the society has been formulated.*

*Substantiated is the expediency of shifting the main political focus from the income-based inequality reduction to provision of equal access to resources and services in the social sphere for various population groups and various territories.*

*Main national and social objectives are determined for attaining comprehensive alleviation and reduction of inequality in access to services as well as ensuring their fair consumption. Proposals are developed to influence inequality through: income policy, labour market policy, increased quality and accessibility of the social sphere services, social protection and inclusion policy, civil society development and social dialogue, regional policy, and local governance advancement.*

**Key words:** *inequality, social inequality, social services, differentiation, social sphere, social infrastructure, human potential, social policy.*

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Inequality by its nature presents quite a complex phenomenon. Observable is the inequality among various social groups of the population as relates to actual income and, respectively, level of disposable material benefits, level of intellectual development based on the achieved education, life expectancy and health condition resulting, for the most part, from available access to the health services infrastructure. Inequality may also be seen among the people themselves, among the countries as well as specific regions of one country. In the context of human development, inequality becomes one of the key drivers of the social-economic development and transformations toward the socially focused society.

The question of the necessity for the inequality to be present in the society as well as its acceptable limits has for long been one of the most controversial from both philosophical take on fair and just society, and in the context of practical steps in developing the respective state policy. This problem becomes especially acute during the period of active transformations in the society when the priorities of the state policy undergo critical changes and modifications. Most of the national and international academia support the view that inequality in accessing benefits and services in the society inevitably leads to destructive processes and prevents the development of the social-economic system itself.

At present, quite a large number of inequality types and manifestations are being examined which may relate to specific spheres of human or societal activities, particular social strata or population groups, territorial units or large-size territorial communities. With time, new forms and manifestations of inequality come to fore, i.e. inequality in accessing services.

In general terms inequality refers to uneven distribution of limited resources, meaning that that it will always be observed in the process of accessing such resources which for various reasons become limited. Therefore, the more limited resources in the society grow, especially those resources which serve to satisfy basic human needs, the more manifestations of inequality will be visible in various domains: from status-related characteristics to territorial ones. Further, the more such manifestations arise, the more complicated it becomes to find consensus in the society for the sake of further advancement.

The notion of equal opportunities and possibilities, closely related to the phenomenon of fair society, is more often used in the context of fair distribution of resources or economically substantiated inequality among people. Equality becomes the necessary and viable condition for the fair society: different personal skills and traits produce different work results even under the similar opportunities and same resource access capabilities. Thus, people entering independent life status and possessing relatively similar potential (health state, educational level, inherited status, etc.) realize such potential differently due to individual characteristics (character, habits, skills, etc.) and under the influence of such things as chance, luck, other extraneous circumstances. So, ensuring equal opportunities in the form of absolutely equal life chances for the sake of obtaining potential for further development does not guarantee equality but, on the contrary, presents each individual with a possibility to realize itself to the fullest [1, p.28].

Social justice in the economic sphere means full synergy of economic relations with such views, needs and interests that dominate in specific community as relates to the possibility of accessing life-important benefits. At different times the fair distribution of benefits was based on various criteria: lineage, social and wealth status, amount of labour spent, family relationship, etc.

Under the market economy the social justice is mainly realized through the re-distribution of revenues among various population groups, provision of social guarantees, creation of equal initial conditions for all strata of the population. The notion of "quality of life" has been used very broadly yet it does not have universally recognized formalized structure and standard set of indicators. Priorities depend on people's needs which are closely related to the level of the national and regional development, therefore criteria for the evaluation of life quality are varied for the developed and developing countries.

Thus, social inequality manifests itself in social relations through the following:

- satisfaction of vital needs of the people, creation of socially recognized life conditions (namely, as relates to providing access to competitive occupational education, specialized medical care, sources of information, spiritual and historical-cultural heritage, provision of housing to low- and middle-income residents);
- social status of individuals which, among others, determines the possibilities for satisfying life needs as well as modes of life activities (on the basis of accepted opportunities and assimilation methods within communities, types and mechanisms of economic activities and interaction).

On the other hand, the scale and dynamics of the social stratification process based on the characteristics of the level of satisfaction of socially vital and individual needs of the people can also be regarded as factors of the territorial organization of production, national and international trans-border regionalization due to their direct impact on the quality of general conditions of social reproduction through formation of social-humanitarian and innovative factors along with the growth stimuli.

Over the period of Ukrainian independence significant changes in the social inequality of people have occurred, so it is important to note three of its core specific features. First, progressive character of social inequality over the years of independence, when the transition has occurred from mainly ethocratic type of social structure with its key factor of accessibility to benefits and services being the association with power structures, thus rendering a sort of uniformity to the social structure, toward the new type characterized by multiple factors and criteria at play. Secondly, social differentiation in the country has not come its full way yet as the transformational processes in the society are still well underway, and turning movements are quite possible even as a result of political factor influence on re-distribution of ownership, power, social standings, etc. Thirdly, the scale of the

social inequality and social gaps between strata and groups of people have changed as compared to the previous historical period when those were considered, according to modern concepts, as very insignificant.

The above described processes have transformed the social landscape of the country producing profound stratification of the population based on the life standards, social status, adaptation to modern social-economic developments. In this context, probably the most complex and pressing question should be: how does inequality in access to services for the people influence macroeconomic processes, whether it stimulates or hampers the social-humanitarian development? In other words, at which level of inequality the social competition will emerge that will stimulate human development in the country, or on the other hand, which inequality will entrench social anomia and increase decline in economic activities of the people.

In the context of completely new social structure which has developed in the post-Soviet society it becomes clear why sociological measurements as of late indicate sharpening focus in the mass consciousness of the Ukrainian people on the problems of wealth and poverty, social inequalities and social injustice and, as a result, inefficient state social policy. Another important reason is not just the mere reluctance in society to accept such model of social inequalities but also a sharp discrepancy between social and professional status of the people and the extent of their social expectations. Thus it comes as no surprise that two-thirds of the working population are confident that based on their qualifications and actual workload they make much less money than they really deserve, and only 15% believe that their work is being adequately remunerated [[http://rabota.ua/info/jobsearcher/post/2017/01/27/zarplata\\_resultat.aspx](http://rabota.ua/info/jobsearcher/post/2017/01/27/zarplata_resultat.aspx)].

Among the existing social inequalities the special attention shall be paid to the fact that majority of Ukrainians are confident there is no adequate appreciation of intellectual efforts nor qualifications which cast doubt on the expenses invested into formation and accumulation of human capital. As a result, very insignificant portion of the population is involved into the process of actual resource investment into accumulation of human capital. Only every tenth resident in the country will invest free funds into education, should such funds become available. Such size of investments, taking into consideration the importance of human capital in strengthening social differentiation, along with their limited scope altogether can only further entrench the social inequality.

In this regard it has to be said that the problem of social justice is now acutely felt not only by the poorest groups of the Ukrainian population but also by the well-to-do people who work hard and earn quite a good income and thus can expect that their social needs will be duly met. Consequently, the general situation in Ukraine with realization of the principle of social justice is therefore being characterized quite in the negative light. The more severe problem than the social injustice is regarded to be the housing issue.

In view of the above, the social policy shall be aimed at ensuring the principle of general good, equal possibilities, while at the same time the principle of "elitist" access to the good quality social services must be reduced.

Reducing inequality in accessing the services on the principle of justice envisages implementation of a comprehensive social policy which shall be based on reducing the poverty in all its manifestations as well as smoothening out of unjustified differences in the quality of life of the people. This means that the practical implementation of such policy should be based on the system of social norms of various levels which reflect minimal limits of services' consumption as well as quality assessments of the people's wellbeing which determine the extent of human potential development. Therefore, modern social policy shall be primarily focused not on helping the vulnerable groups of the population, but rather on reaching the level of protecting the vital interests of an individual, family and society. Today in Ukraine it is methodologically unacceptable to reduce the essence of the social policy to mere social support, and unless adequate conditions are created for various strata and groups of the population with the purpose of advancing their vital potential the inequality in the country will only continue to rise along with the increased heterogeneity of the society. This means that the imperative for the social policy should be the fulfillment of a dual task: improving life standards of the majority of the people and resolving the most pressing social problems.

Destructive processes in the social infrastructure of Ukraine are closely connected with the continuous ignoring by the state of the social environment in the country, lack of constructive state policy on financial subventions to the local budgets. This results in continuous fall in the access of the people to socially-oriented services along with deterioration of their scope and quality. For example, 46,5% of the total number of Ukrainian villages do not have the mandatory first medical aid facility, only 31,2% of the villages have daycare facilities, 48,7% - schools, 57,8% - cultural facilities. Most of the village residential areas are unable to develop or improve their utility services.

Special place among the various types of inequality is taken by the economic inequality which shall be construed as a difference between individuals and specific groups of people as relates to the size of their income earned and wealth and property accumulated. In many aspects it is the economic inequality that spurs other types of social inequality since under the market economy income becomes the core factor of access to the quality social services.

The very nature of economic inequality is quite multi-faceted, but generally the reasons that cause it can be narrowed down to the two following groups:

- 1) personal traits of the people which enable a person to earn a specific level of income;
- 2) special features of the national wealth redistribution which determine different types of access to this wealth by various categories of the population

At the same time, dominating is the view that the more even distribution of wealth promotes human development rather than impedes it. In particular, the law of diminishing returns explains why the more egalitarian distribution produces greater results for the human development and advancement of the poor groups of population (e.g. efficiency of the revenue increase for the health and education of the high-income population is lower than the efficiency of such increase for the poor).

Based on the above, correlation can be observed between inequality and:

- health (for instance, in the countries with the high level of inequality life expectancy at birth is significantly lower than in the countries where revenues are distributed more evenly. Also, there is a strong correlation between inequality and maternal and child deaths);
- education (access to education and respectively the general level of the population's literacy falls when the level of inequality in revenue distribution rises).

Moreover, it has been substantiated empirically that the economic growth is mostly neutral as relates to distribution (inequality) and bears negative correlation with the poverty level (economic growth of 1% is capable of reducing the poverty level by 2,4%) [4]. With this, reducing inequality against the background of economic growth expedites the fall of poverty level.

Most conspicuously the inequality manifests itself in the following domains: firstly, observed is the huge polarization in the standards and quality of life of the Ukrainian people, residents of various regions and communities. As a result, the efforts to overcome inequality in access to social infrastructure services on the principles of social justice becomes the most important trend in implementing the state social-economic policy. Secondly, great concern is raised due to degradation of the rural areas as residential environment which is resulting from the low income of the people and poor condition of the social infrastructure facilities.

One of the most noticeable factors of the Ukrainian independence became the inequality between residents of different in size local communities and settlements, primarily as relates to access to social sphere services. In old Soviet times there was a well-organized network of social infrastructure which, despite a whole range of functional issues, could still guarantee the provision of necessary services to every citizen. Over the years of independence the constant deficit of budgetary funds and practically complete lack of financing to support infrastructural facilities have led to severe deterioration and sharp degradation of the social sphere in small communities and settlements. And if in very small rural settlements the process of massive reduction of medical, educational and cultural facilities is already well underway, the communities of regional and oblast level can expect this process to start any time soon now. So, that means that the problem of limited access to social sphere services in the context of territorial aspect is getting worse year on year, and without resolving the critical issue of retaining infrastructural facilities (first of all in communities financed on the basis of the "residual funding") the problem of people's access to such services may become catastrophic.

Inequality in accessing basic social sphere services and infrastructural facilities has a very clear territorial dependence: the smaller the community the lesser become the possibilities, freedom of choice becomes more limited and quality of services falls. Rural area residents are more often to suffer from the lack of possibility to receive medical, educational and other types of services, and on the top of that the quality of such services is usually much more inferior to that of such services in the cities. As we talk about different possibilities of access which are mainly related to the distribution of social resources, the community-level inequality may well be construed as the social injustice. Inadequate support for small settlements, primarily villages, in terms of infrastructural facilities, must have been offset by a well-developed network of quality roads and regular transportation to larger size settlements. However, over the last few decades this problem has not only been resolved but further deteriorated, and so based on observations of local residents life conditions in 2016 there were following issues identified:

- every fourth family felt the lack of any medical institution or drugstore in the vicinity;
- almost half of the families were unable to use ambulance service;
- more than a quarter felt the lack of regular daily transportation to a larger settlement with more developed infrastructure;
- every second was inconvenienced by the absence of facilities providing domestic services, and every sixth - by the lack of retail store in the vicinity.

Another serious reason of the limited access of the population to basic social infrastructure services, along with the territorial problem, is the lack of financial resources at households. Commercialization of such sphere, especially as relates to medical and daycare services, forces families to make a difficult choice between the state institutions (with low costs yet not always good quality services and quite often limited access to many of them) and private clinics (with prohibitive prices and focused exclusively on a wealthy segment of the population).

Emergence of the huge price gap between the state and private institutions has further exacerbated inequality in access to basic social sphere services and worsened the quality of such services provided by the state facilities since the majority of the population did not have much choice but to use state clinics and daycare centers and in order to receive improved quality of services had to make unofficial payments. Resulting from this situation was unfair, inefficient and socially unjustified distribution of limited social benefits between various groups of the population in view of the fact that the services at the state institutions, although on the surface being declared as free of charge and accessible to all, have in fact proved to be unavailable to many or available on very different conditions.

General accessibility to free of charge secondary education and partial compensation for the professional education in Ukraine serves as a quite positive sign. Some things that were preserved from the old system and developed over the years of the independence enabled the country to receive good ratings in the international rating systems on literacy of the population. However, still pressing remains the issue of universal access to good quality secondary education irrespective of the locality of residence and level of family income.

It is the quality characteristics of the educational services that today present the core element of inequality. The smaller the locality the lesser become the possibilities of good educational facilities available with professional teachers on all subjects, especially in the rural areas. However, even in many large cities the level of teaching remains much to be desired. Lower level of secondary education (resulting from poor teaching as well as lack of funds for private tutoring) polarizes society and creates better chances for some at the expense of others. A child who was unable to receive sufficient knowledge, including due to the lack of funds, in order to enter a higher educational institution on the free-of-charge basis will not be able to receive desired level of education on the paid/contract basis, and thus will lose good chances in life.

Very important factor for raising one's social status as well as life chances becomes the job opportunity for youth, yet today this also to a large extent depends on the status-related characteristics: parents, family ties, friends, etc. The situation when a chance of good job arises irrespective of the rating of educational institution one had graduated as well as individual qualities of the aspirant can be

considered as an important component of spontaneous social differentiation or large economically unsubstantiated influences on formation of inequality.

Therefore, inequality in the Ukrainian society has numerous manifestations and is formed mainly through economic factors, however great importance also belongs to the psychological principles of the society and influential social groups which promote or rather do not impede fringe (discriminatory) manifestations of various forms of inequality. To eliminate excessive inequality in the modern Ukrainian society would mean to most successfully ensure equal chances and opportunities for all the people for the sake of individual development through expanding the possibilities of access, especially for the most vulnerable population groups, to social benefits and quality services in the social sphere as well as consolidation of the society on a way to elimination of all forms of discrimination. Taking into consideration the need to develop comprehensive and substantial recommendations for the respective policy implementation it would be advisable to put main focus on ensuring equal access to social sphere resources and services for various groups of the population and various territorial communities.

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