

CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE IN UKRAINE: CONSEQUENCES OF FULL-SCALE WAR

Ludmila SLYUSAR, PhD in economics,
M.V. Ptukha Institute of Demography and Social Research
of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1679-1674>, slyusarl@ukr.net

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***Abstract.** The spread of the phenomenon of social orphanhood, neglect of some children is one of the acute socio-demographic problems of Ukraine in the last three decades. Orphans and children deprived of parental care are a special group of children who's the number has increased in Ukraine since the mid-1990s, that is, during the period of maximum aggravation of the transformational crisis. The gradual improvement of the economic situation and society's attention to childhood problems, the activation of social policy contributed to a gradual decrease in the number of children in this category. Family forms of keeping these children have become widespread - guardianship, foster families, family-type orphanages, etc. But in the conditions of a full-scale war, the positive trend towards a gradual decrease in the number of these children was interrupted, since many children suffered from the war: their parents died or were seriously injured, went missing, were forcibly deported, etc. This is one of the worst consequences of war. Creating comfortable living conditions and harmonious development of this group of children in the conditions of war is a difficult task that requires a scientific approach, improving legislation and concentrating the efforts of relevant organizations. In the extreme conditions of the war, family forms of keeping children left without parental care due to the war are spreading: increasing cases of taking into families for guardianship/care and national adoption is continuing. The study is based on information from open sources, expert assessments, and data from the State Statistics Service.*

Keywords: children, war, orphans, children deprived of parental care, family.

JEL: J10, J13, H56

UDC:304+314] (477)

Introduction. An important characteristic of the efficiency of society, the socio-demographic and economic situation in the country is the family's performance of its functions regarding the maintenance and upbringing of children. In recent decades, there is a special group of children in Ukraine - orphans and children deprived of parental care, and this is evidence of serious failures in the performance of the basic functions of the family, the imperfection and inefficiency of many institutions of society. This is a consequence of acute socio-demographic problems, the existence of segments of the population with an extremely low quality of life, and the formation of a group of sociopathic families. Children of this category – it is a problem of protecting childhood, ensuring decent conditions of upbringing and maintenance for all children, and in the future, it is a problem of

deformation of the demographic, labor and social potential of the country, a decrease in the quality of some of their segments.

Our **paper aims** to determine the causes and scope of the problem of orphans and children deprived of parental care in Ukraine, the negative changes and risks that appeared as a result of a full-scale Russian military invasion, as well as the reaction of the Ukrainian state and society to them.

Data and methods. The research was carried out on the basis of data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, information from open sources, expert assessments, on the materials of sample surveys. The methods of comparative analysis, generalization and induction, surveys, and statistical and graphic methods were used in the research.

Main results. An increase in the number of social orphans and children deprived of parental care has been observed in Ukraine since the mid-1990s, when the economic, demographic, and social situation in the country worsened sharply as a result of the transformational crisis. The increase in unemployment, the decrease of living standards of the population in the conditions of accelerated economic and social stratification became the reason for the formation of a stratum of sociopathic families. These families are characterized by stagnant unemployment, alcoholism, drug addiction, and family violence. In these families, parents do not fulfill their responsibilities for the maintenance and upbringing of children: they do not take care of the physical and spiritual development of the child, his education, do not provide the necessary nutrition, medical care, do not create conditions for obtaining an education. Sometimes a child is treated cruelly. A child may suffer from physical, psychological, and economic violence, may be involved in the worst forms of child labor. As a result of such a situation, the child is often "pushed out" from the family: the child either leaves his parents, the place of his permanent residence, or state services for the protection of children's rights intervene. Demographic phenomena such as the instability of marriage, the high rate of divorce, and the prevalence of single-parent families with children in a period of economic crisis have increased the risk of social orphanhood. In this way, a special group of children is formed - children-social orphans, children without parental care.

Statistical information on the total number of such children has been available since 2003, when the corresponding statistical reporting was introduced. This category includes children who, for various reasons, cannot live in their own family: orphans (their parents have died or perished) and children deprived of parental care (their parents are deprived of parental rights, or are recognized as unaccountably absent or incapacitated, parents are unknown or abandoned the child). The number of such children in Ukraine was the maximum in 2008 (103,542 children, i.e. 1,265 per 100,000 children), but in subsequent years it gradually decreased (*Fig. 1*). This was due to the improvement of the socio-economic situation in the country and the activation of social policy: work with families in difficult life situations, with single mothers, support for national adoption, etc. At the end of 2021, before the start of the war, the number of orphans and children deprived of parental care was 67,586 [1, pp. 115-116].

In Ukraine, a fairly active socio-demographic policy is implemented to improve the conditions of upbringing and maintenance of orphans and children deprived of parental care. Family forms of maintenance of these children have

become widespread in modern Ukraine. This allows children to be prepared for life in society, and significantly reduces the risks produced by the phenomenon of social orphanhood. In 2007, the State targeted social program for reforming the system of institutions for orphans and children deprived of parental care was adopted. Its main goal was the optimization of the old network of institutions for such children and the creation of modern-type institutions with living and upbringing conditions close to family ones. Thanks to this state strategy, the number of family-type orphanages and foster families increased rapidly (*Table 1*).

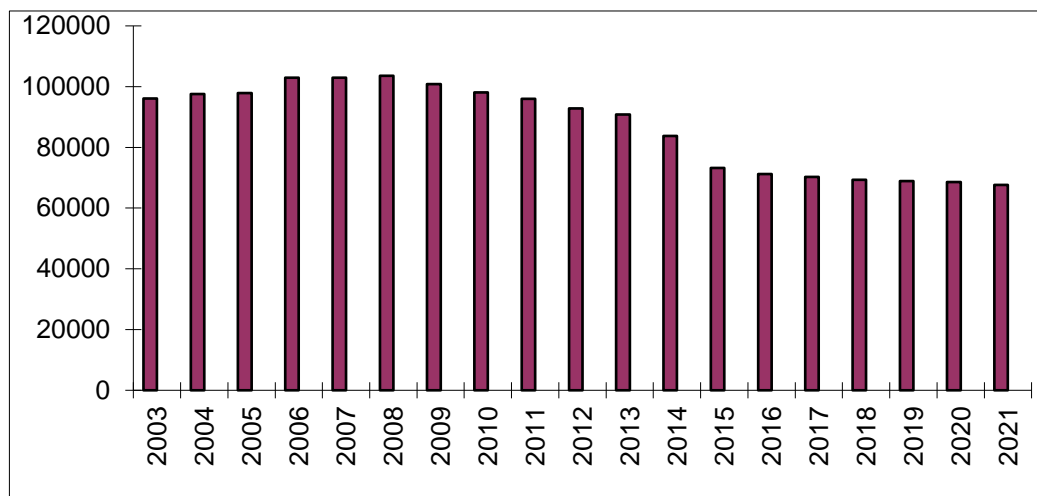


Figure 1. The number of orphans and children deprived of parental care in Ukraine, 2003-2021

Source: Protection of children who need special attention of society. Statistical collections 2010-2019; Social Security of Ukraine Population in 2021. Statistical publication.

Table 1. The number of family-type orphanages and foster families in Ukraine, 2003-2021*

	2003	2005	2008	2010	2015	2017	2019	2021
The number of family-type orphanages	123	149	400	535	939	1019	1153	1298
there are foster children, persons	917	1025	2605	3573	6169	6809	7874	9083
The number of foster families	...	180	2461	3195	3901	3677	3346	3049
there are foster children, persons	...	288	4050	5451	7187	6880	6184	5830

*Source: Protection of children who need special attention of society. Statistical collections 2010-2019; Social Security of Ukraine Population in 2021. Statistical publication. Note: * Statistical reporting about family-type children's homes was introduced in Ukraine in 2003, and about regard to foster families - in 2005.*

There were 1,298 family-type orphanages in the country at the end of 2021, 10,082 children were raised in them, of which 9,083 were foster children, and 3,049 foster families, with 7,385 children, of which 5,830 were foster children [1, p. 119]. In fact, a new type of family has been formed in Ukraine - a foster family (if it has more than 4 children, it receives the status of a family-type orphanage), in which foster parents are raising children who are not biologically related to them, often together with their own children, and receive certain payments from the state for this. Foster parents are obliged to raise a child, take care of its health, physical, mental, and spiritual development, and ensure that the child receives a full general secondary education.

August 2017 The National Strategy for Reforming the System of Institutional Supervision and Guardianship of Children Deprived of Parental Care for 2017–2026 was adopted. Its main goal is the gradual decrease of the number of children living in establishments of institutional care, due to the further development of family forms of their maintenance, support for national adoption, support and social support of families in a crisis situation.

Effective prevention of the phenomenon of social orphanhood, prevention of rejection of a child from the family is effective assistance to families with children who are in crisis situations - due to a difficult life situation or due to antisocial behavior of family members. In Ukraine, the foundations of a system of assistance to such families were laid in recent years; there is an understanding that the best way to protect a child is to support his family, to create conditions for the performance of parental functions. State social services keep records of families who find themselves in a difficult life situation and need help. These families are provided with assistance in the form of social services, social support, social prevention and social rehabilitation.

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine deformed socio-demographic processes. The positive trend towards a gradual decrease of the number of orphans and children deprived of parental care was interrupted because many children were affected by the war. From February 24, 2022 to September 24, 2023, 504 children died, 1,125 were injured (data from the Prosecutor General's Office) [2]. However, these data are incomplete, since it is impossible to establish the exact number of affected children due to active hostilities and the temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine.

One of the most serious consequences of the war is the increase of the number children deprived of parental care - their parents have died, are in captivity, forcibly deported, their whereabouts are unknown, etc. This is one of the worst consequences of war. According to the data of the National Social Service of Ukraine, in the period from February 24, 2022 to April 1, 2023, regional services for children found 8,512 children who were left without parental care in wartime conditions, of which 1,476 children became orphans as a result of the military aggression of the Russian Federation against of Ukraine. According to preliminary statistical data of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine and the National Social Service, the total number of orphans and children deprived of parental care in 2022 was 66.5 thousand [3]. This is slightly less than in 2021 (67, 7 thousand), because many children went abroad and there is no information about the occupied regions

of Ukraine. Due to hostilities and the occupation of part of Ukraine, statistics on orphans cannot be accurate.

Military danger caused the forced evacuation of institutional care facilities for children. The state tried to remove almost all children deprived of parental care from the active combat zone. According to the testimony of the leaders of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, in 2022, 277 children's institutions were evacuated to safer regions of Ukraine, 198 abroad [4]. These children's institutions cannot return to those areas where security cannot be ensured. Many foster families, family-type orphanages were also forced to leave Ukraine.

The war caused the forced migration of a large number of the population to safer regions of the country. Families with children are one of the most vulnerable categories of the population at this time. This especially applies to foster families and family-type orphanages. They usually have a larger family, and therefore need appropriate living conditions. Some children may also need social, psychological, psychiatric and rehabilitation services. According to the survey conducted in September-November 2022, the situation of foster families and family-type orphanages - forced internal migrants - is difficult. Foster families and family-type orphanages need, above all, a quality place to live. The available housing is often too small, so there are problems with the child's lack of personal space, lack of space to store clothes and things. Children often do not have the conditions to organize online learning. The material situation of foster families and family-type orphanages is mostly such that it allows meeting only urgent needs. Foster parents and children say that the experienced stress significantly affected their physical and psycho-emotional state [5].

The situation in the occupied territories is difficult, there is no complete information about children there. It is documented that 19,546 children were deported or forcibly relocated to Russia (this is the data of the National Information Bureau), many of them are children who lived in different types of orphanages. However, these figures are not complete, the Ombudsman of Ukraine assumes that Russia illegally removed about 150 thousand children from Ukraine, according to other information - 200-300 thousand. The deportation of Ukrainian children to the territory of the Russian Federation is a war crime.

For the comfortable, harmonious development of children who have not of care by their parents as a result of the war, it is necessary to ensure that they live in a family or an environment that is as similar as possible to a family. However, with the beginning of the war, many obstacles appeared in the adoption and guardianship procedures, since in the first months of the war there were interruptions in the work of services for children, in the work of the judicial system, without which these procedures are impossible. A significant part of the children who have already found potential parents were evacuated abroad (you can only adopt a child who is in the country), and their potential adopters lost their property, remained in the occupied territory, went abroad, etc.

It is positive that even in the extreme conditions of the war, in Ukraine adoption continues, children are taken under the care of relatives. In 2022, almost 700 children were adopted. Most of the children who became orphans during the war do not enter the adoption system, but immediately go under the care and

protection of their closest relatives - grandmothers, aunts, brothers, sisters, etc. In 2022, the total number of children under guardianship/ care, usually relatives, increased by 6,622 and reached 40,220 [6]. And in the first quarter of 2023, 29,847 children received an official guardian. During the full-scale war, 22,000 people in Ukraine applied for the adoption of children through the "The child is not alone" chatbot.

During the period of martial law in Ukraine, the procedures for registering children deprived of parental care in family forms of support have been simplified. In accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated March 22, 2022 No. 349, during martial law, children left without parental care may be temporarily placed in a family-type orphanage or in foster families. At the same time, the procedure for registration of guardianship over a child who has lost parents by the child's relatives has been simplified. Now the child's godparents can also take guardianship of the child according to a simplified procedure.

In peacetime, to become a guardian, it was necessary to collect many documents. In the conditions of war, it is difficult to get them, since the state registers are closed, therefore, candidates for guardianship are not required to provide such certificates. Also, candidates for guardians are temporarily not required to take a training course about raising children deprived of parental care.

The procedure for submitting documents for adoption has been simplified. In September 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Resolution No. 1013, which expands the possibilities for establishing the status of a child so that he/she is placed in a family as soon as possible. From June 1, 2022, you can sign up for an initial online consultation on the adoption procedure through the "Diya" application portal, and from September, potential parents can register to adopt a child online. The adoption procedure through the "Diya" application made the whole process as efficient and clear, all document submission procedures maximally simplified. Previously, all documents from various instances were on paper, today through "Diya" you can submit the entire package of documents, which will be checked by employees of the child protection service.

Since the beginning of the war, Ukraine has banned international adoption. In 2022, only children were adopted by foreigners for whom the adoption procedure was initiated before February 24. For adoption, as for foster care, the opinion of the child is important, it is best when the child knows his potential parents/guardians.

Conclusion. In the conditions of a full-scale war, the problem of orphans and children deprived of parental care became more acute and more complex. Many children suffered because of Russia's armed aggression. These children are a particularly vulnerable population group and need maximum attention. Foster families and family-type orphanages, which were forced to emigrate from the war zone to safer regions, are in difficult conditions. This is one of the challenges for the Ukrainian state.

In the extreme conditions of the war, the process of adoption and taking into guardianship children who were left without parents is actively taking place. This is evidence of the strength of family relationships (most children are "sorted out" by their relatives), humanity and attention to the children of the population. Changes

in the legislation made by the state for placement these children in a family also contribute to this

In the future, the state must implement a consistent policy of caring for these children, ensure their harmonious development and create conditions for living and upbringing in a family or an environment close to family ones. This requires comprehensive support and improvement of assistance mechanisms for all family forms of maintenance and upbringing of children this category - foster families, family-type orphanages, guardianship families, support for national adoption. This requires appropriate finances, organizational work, and changes in legislation.

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