

*Dykha M.V.*

## **KEY PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN UKRAINE, SOLUTIONS AND APPROACHES: THE SOCIAL ASPECT**

Nowadays practically every country of the world has a global goal: to ensure sustainable economic growth, to increase prosperity and to improve the quality of life for its population. However, in today's signs of a crisis due to civilizational development and world globalization, many countries face challenges in achieving this goal.

Unfortunately, the results of transformational changes in Ukraine throughout the years of independence differ from the expected and the desirable (taking into account the initial conditions of Ukraine). They have not led to sustainable economic growth and development, but have caused excessive social polarization. The first stage of extemporary transformation (1991-1995) was defined by partial preservation of the planned economic system and the attempts to modernize it without radical restructuring by introducing new economic elements and relations into the structure of national economy.

Ukraine lost about half of its GDP from its 1990 level during the first years of independence, moreover, systemic shortcomings of this period in many respects predetermined further socio-economic problems of the country. At the second stage of the in-depth transformation (1996-1999), the total abandonment of the system-forming role of planning-distributive relations in state policy and practice took place, resulting in transformations in all spheres of production and circulation. The third stage (2000-2008) was marked by positive dynamics in the development of individual branches of the economy and al GDP in gener. The period from 2000 to 2008 was a period of relative stability. The nonviolent "Orange" revolution in November 2004 gave hopes and aspirations to Ukrainian people that there would be a turning point in the development of the economy and public consciousness, that Ukraine would navigate towards building a democratic state, securing human rights and freedoms and creating an equally supportive business environment throughout, rather than favouring business interests of certain oligarchs. However, Ukraine's peaceful aspiration for a civilized future was ruined by systemic bureaucracy and corruption confrontation of political forces. Since the end of 2008 and in 2009, one could witness all typical crisis phenomena in the economy of Ukraine. The improvement of the situation in 2010-2011 was reversed by deceleration of the growth rate of the national economy in 2012. Since November 2013, political and legal upheaval in Ukraine, and since 2014, the secondary effects of the Crimea annexation and hostilities in the Donbas spread onto most sectors of domestic economy (for more details see [2]).

The state and trends of socioeconomic development of Ukraine give grounds for determining its key problems, challenges and risks:

- hostilities in Donbas, aggression of Russia against Ukraine, a whole range of socio-economic problems for people, businesses, and the state as a whole;

- corruption, uncivilized accumulation of capital, strengthening and merging of oligarchic capital with the state apparatus, subordination of the economy and the state in general to corporate interests, shadowing of the economy;

- low competitiveness of the national economy under increasing global competition, which involves aside from traditional markets of goods, capitals, technologies, labor, also national management systems, innovation support, human resources development; raw materials export model of economic development; shortage of foreign trade balance; deformed structure of industrial production; decline in the influence of numerous conventional (extensive) factors of growth; depreciation of fixed assets; low level of labor efficiency; high level of resource and energy consumption of the economy; downsides and drawbacks of the fuel and energy complex; insufficient approval of the innovative development model;

- deficiency of the state budget; shortage of pension funds; increase of the state and guaranteed by the state debt; insufficient development of the financial services market; extra-bank money circulation;

- inefficient employment policy, social protection; low effective demand of the population.

We can observe a widening gap between wealthy and low-income groups of the population, the social class, which consists of people who suffer from unstable lifestyles, is growing in numbers. Therefore, dealing with the standard of living of a large part of the population in Ukraine, the term "precariat" is increasingly used.

Analyzing the key problems, challenges and risks in the social sphere, we can state that over the years of independence, unfortunately, Ukraine has been unable to form an integral concept of social protection and the labor market.

**1. The employment policy is ineffective.** The number of unemployed people registered in the employment agencies of Ukraine, although significantly reduced during 2016, exceeded 390 thousand people at the end of 2016 (Table 1).

*Table 1*

**Data on unemployed people registered in employment agencies, 2016**

Index-numbers	Months											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Number of people registered, in thousands	508,6	508,2	467,5	434,7	416,4	388,9	369,7	355,7	341,5	316,2	337,9	390,8
Applicants for a single vacancy	16,2	13,1	9,4	11,0	9,2	9,5	8,7	6,6	6,0	5,5	6,3	10,8
Successful applicants, % of registered	3,5	4,9	9,6	11,6	7,6	7,3	6,3	5,9	7,7	12,1	5,8	3,9

The source: compiled from the data [7; 9].

The number of applicants for a single vacancy varied from 16.2 people for a single vacancy in January to 5.5 people in October. The average annual number of applicants for a single vacancy is 9.4. On average, 7.2% of people found jobs among the registered ones.

According to the methodology of the International Labor Organization, which takes into account the total number of able-bodied, the number of those who work and those who do not work, we can observe that the unemployment rate of the economically active population in 2016 amounted to 9.3% (1678.2 thousand people); the working-age population – 9.7% (1677.5 thousand people) (Table 2). As a rule, these are people who did not work for more than a year, which means they lost their right for help, and it makes no sense for them to register. Consequently, the unemployed people registered with state employment agencies make up about one fifth of all those who are not working.

The unemployment rate in Ukraine is dictated by a number of factors. One of the important factors is the demand on the labor market for unpopular job titles – such as builders, turners, help staff, salesmen. The demand for IT professionals remains high. The least needed are lawyers, economists, accountants, insurance agents. Due to the mismatch of the structure of vocational training to the needs of Ukrainian labor market there is a significant imbalance between their demand and supply. That leads to increasing risk of unemployment benefits hike and additional costs for professional retraining of the unemployed. Another pressing issue is the problem of "the first workplace" and the employment of people who are over 40 years of age.

Table 2

**Labour market in 2016**

<b>Economically active population</b>	<b>In average, thousands of people</b>	<b>% of population of a corresponding age group</b>
in age 15-70	17 955,1	62,2
capable of working age	17 303,6	71,1
<b>Including</b>		
<b>Employed population</b>	<b>In average, thousands of people</b>	<b>% of population of a corresponding age group</b>
in age 15-70	16 276,9	56,3
capable of working age	15 626,1	64,2
<b>Unemployed population (according to the ILO methodology)</b>	<b>In average, thousands of people</b>	<b>% of population of a corresponding age group</b>
in age 15-70	1 678,2	9,3
capable of working age	1 677,5	9,7

\* The data were presented omitting the temporarily occupied territories of Crimea and the city of Sebastopol, as well as a certain area being part of Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone.

The source: compiled according to the data from [7; 9].

Concerning the situation at the labor market, the number of the employed population aged between 15-70 amounted to 16276.9 thousand people in 2016. The level of employment was 56.3%.

The lack of the state employment strategy is accompanied by significant social costs, depreciation and dequalification of workforce, and shortage of skilled engineers and workers, high migration intentions.

Addressing the problems of unemployment requires a significant increase in job openings, which can be achieved through "new industrialization", the creation of modern high-tech enterprises in various sectors of the economy, modernization of the existing ones (ranging from rocket and aircraft construction jobs to vacancies in light and agricultural processing industries). "New industrialization" in Ukraine has a distinct possibility providing the implementation of rapid and systemic reforms in the field of public administration, creation of a favorable investment and entrepreneurial climate, and so on.

**2. Remuneration of labour is low.** The level of remuneration determines such basic macroeconomic parameters as effective demand, living standards of the population. Despite the increase in the minimum wage in Ukraine to 3200 UAH from January 1, 2017 onwards, the share of wages and salaries in production costs and GDP is low. The share of wages and salaries in the cost of production is only 10%, while in Western Europe it reaches up to 45%. The share of wages and salaries in GDP in Ukraine is 51%, while in the EU countries it is on average 65%. At the same time, Ukraine's GDP is smaller than the GDP of an average European country by 4 times, while wages and salaries are lower by 5.6-19.7 times.

Boosting pay levels is the most effective way of fighting poverty, increasing purchasing power of population and reducing the outflow of skilled workers abroad.

European countries have long since arrived at conclusion that the minimum wage should meet the needs of workers and their families, as reflected in ILO Convention No. 131 ratified by Ukraine [6] and the European Social Charter (revised) [4].

In order to ensure that decent wages and salaries are paid to workers on the basis of equitable distribution of labor outcome and raising the level of labor income to the EU standards, to achieve European guarantees in remuneration of labour, an adequate level of social protection of workers, to ensure equal access of all citizens to public goods, social justice and non-discrimination in all of its aspects, we must combine the efforts of legislative, national and local executive authorities, employers and employees.

**3. Social protection policy failure.** State policy in the field of social protection focuses on the unceasing increase in the number of insufficiently substantiated social benefits, allowances, subsidies etc. Regarding the social sphere, budget funds are mostly directed to maintaining payments under a structure dominated by passive elements of social protection. Active elements (education, vocational training, medicine) which increase the occupational and

intellectual potential of a person remain the subject of residual financing. Such an approach inhibits systemic market transformations, significantly reducing their effectiveness. In addition, the national social protection policy inefficiency is due to inconsistency with labor, taxation, family and demography policies.

The corpus of current legislation in the field of social protection and social security consists of quite controversial legislative acts, which were adopted at different times, are cumbersome and unmanageable.

In particular, benefits and allowances, social benefits, social services in Ukraine are prescribed by more than 50 laws and more than 120 subordinate legal acts. According to the current legislation, there are about 120 categories of beneficiaries in Ukraine, of which only 45 categories are determined on a social basis, whereas 57 categories are determined on a professional basis. There are more than 130 categories of recipients of social benefits, of which 70 categories receive social benefits on a social basis, and about 50 categories receive social benefits for professional reasons.

Lacking appropriate resources, the state has made additional commitments in the field of social protection and social security, which often have no effect, except for the privileges for representatives of certain occupations or social groups.

Financing of expenditures in the field of social protection and social security from the state budget and targeted extrabudgetary funds is non-systemic and non-transparent.

At the same time, expenditures of social nature can be found in various expenditure items of the consolidated budget at the national and local levels. Therefore, the real volume of all social expenditures of the nation is 3-4 times higher than declared by the "Social protection and social security" item of the consolidated budget.

In our opinion, further reproduction of the unmanageable social and financially untenable system of allowances and social benefits, while preserving the inefficient, extensive network of the state social protection institutions, is inadmissible.

Ukraine, recognizing international standards in the social sphere, should take sufficient measures to implement them.

It is necessary to introduce more efficient and economically sound forms and types of social protection, which should be followed by the development of a network of social services institutions at the community level, since it is more in line with the European model and international standards.

It is essential to eliminate all "loss zones" in the social sector. The author is convinced of the necessity to monitor the system of benefits, social and compensatory payments and recipients of benefits for determining the amount of necessary budget funds for the financing of the system of benefits and refusal to grant benefits to those categories (and persons in particular) that are

unreasonably included in them. Resources should be directed to those who really need them, not to people who can easily do without them. In particular, even childbirth financial assistance should be provided on a more explicit basis. It is advisable to refuse to provide benefits on a professional basis, and a decent standard of living must be ensured by the proper level of remuneration. It is important to stop the policy of supporting institutions by default, paying no attention to the influence of their work on citizens (when the interests of officials in institutions outweigh the interests of those whom they work for).

Consequently, reforms in the field of social protection and social security should be implemented in the following areas:

- reconsidering legislation on the established benefits, allowances and social payments downward to reducing the number of categories of their recipients;
- ensuring transition from social benefits system to targeted social benefits and social services;
- cancelling benefits provided on the professional basis;
- reviewing the system of criteria and grounds for granting privileges and social benefits to citizens;
- ensuring transparency in financing of social expenditures;
- coordinating legislation in the field of social protection and social security with budget legislation.

**4. Issues of pension provision. Unaccomplished pension reform.** The pension system, despite the important results of changing pension legislation, has a number of disadvantages. Most measures to address pension provision problems are of a parametric nature and are aimed at reducing (overcoming) the budget deficit of the Pension Fund of Ukraine.

However, for future pensioners, retirement benefits tend to become less comfortable (with some rare exceptions), therefore, the task of ensuring a decent standard of their living is not resolved.

The deficit of the Pension Fund of Ukraine is additionally financed from the state budget. It is worth noting that the malmanagement of the funds, such as the State Budget of Ukraine and state extrabudgetary funds, which are organizationally separated from the state budget and have a certain autonomy, is a significant drawback of the budget process.

In total, four extrabudgetary funds (1. Own revenues of the Pension Fund; 2. Income of the Social Insurance Fund for temporary disability; 3. Income of the Social Insurance Fund against accidents at work and occupational diseases; 4. Income of the Fund of Mandatory State Social Insurance in case of unemployment) accumulate on average 13% of GDP or a quarter of the financial resources of the entire system of public finances in Ukraine. In terms of financial resources mobilization, the largest of the four funds is, naturally, the Pension Fund of Ukraine (85-87% of the total amount of social fund revenues).

The problem is becoming more pressing also due to the fact that the number of pensioners in Ukraine is increasing, which inversely leads to an increase in the budgetary burden (Table 3).

Table 3

**Average rate of monthly pension benefit and the number of pensioners at the beginning of the year**

Year	Average rate of prescribed monthly pension benefit to the pensioners, registered with the Pension Fund agencies, in UAH				Number of pensioners, in thousands
	total	including			
		due to age	due to disability	no income earner	
2006	406,8	417,7	393,2	302,8	14050,0
2007	478,4	497,0	435,8	339,3	13936,8
2008*	776,0	798,9	624,4	517,5	13819,0
2009	934,3	942,7	780,7	696,6	13749,8
2010	1032,6	1039,6	884,6	807,9	13721,1
2011	1151,9	1156,0	1033,8	940,0	13738,0
2012	1253,3	1252,4	1164,3	1053,8	13820,5
2013	1470,7	1464,3	1359,2	1252,8	13639,7
2014	1526,1	1521,6	1406,5	1303,8	13533,3
2015**	1581,5	1573,0	1432,1	1433,1	12147,2
2016**	1699,5	1690,3	1545,2	1640,3	12296,5
2017**	1828,3	1808,9	1705,9	1803,0	11956,2

\* Since the beginning of 2008, the average rate of the pension benefit (except for the category "due to age") is given based on the pensioners whose pension benefits are being granted and paid by the Pension Fund authorities in accordance with the Law of Ukraine "On pension provision of individuals dismissed from the military service, and some other individuals".

Data on the average rate of monthly pensions granted are based on target financial assistance and indexation provided by the law.

\*\* Excluding temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and partially the area of the anti-terrorist operation zone.

Source: compiled according to the data from [9].

During the years covered by the research, the rate of pension benefits has increased, the structure of pension recipients has not changed significantly. More than 77% of them are retired due to age; the second numerous one is the category of pensioners retired due to disability (about 10%). There is a significant stratification of pensioners by pension volumes. More than 95% of the pensioners receive pension benefits at the rate of 1000-2000 UAH; less than 1% of pensioners get pension benefits of more than 4000 UAH.

Improving the functioning of the pension provision system and solving the issues of pension provision are directly related to improving the macroeconomic

status of the nation (reducing inflation rate, reducing unemployment rate, raising wages and salaries).

It is important to reduce the scale "shadow" wage payments to employees (illegal wage and salary payments without taxation and remitting the contributions to social insurance funds), the perfect option would be a complete cessation of paying shadow wages and salaries and full transition of business entities to the legal sector.

Furthermore, the state should actively engage the services of non-state pension funds in providing pension schemes.

Given the current demographic conditions (population aging), the top priority of national social and demographic policies should not be mere enhancing the birth rate, but also the prolongation of meaningful employment, full-scale economic and social activity of the population of older age groups.

Pension reform should be founded and conducted on a systematic ground, tested by experience of other countries and adapted to Ukrainian conditions, namely:

- social justice, acceptance, understanding and support of the reform by vast majority of population;
- freedom of choice, stimulating interest, involvement and responsibility of citizens for their own well-being in the long run;
- economic feasibility and financial capacity and stability of the pension system;
- promoting the growth of national savings and economic development of the country;
- insuring against political risks.

Creating an adequate market economy of the pension system will increase the level of responsibility of citizens for their destiny, will prompt them to save portion of their earnings for old age, will help them overcome paternalism attitudes and expectations.

The multi-level pension system, built on the principles of social justice, solidarity of generations and social insurance, will expand opportunities for welfare and decent standards of living for the elderly.

**5. Health care system inefficiency.** The domestic health care system is not able to adequately meet the needs of the population in medical care, to ensure availability and quality of medical services. This is reflected in medical and demographic indicators. Thus, in 2013 the natural reduction of population numbers was 158712 people (3,5 person per 1000 people), in 2016 natural decrease in the population numbers (excluding temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and some areas of anti-terrorist operation zone) amounted to 186592 people.

The need for reformation of the health care system, the use of the most up-to-date protocols in the provision of medical services is beyond doubt. However, ways and mechanisms for practical implementation of changes in medicine are debatable, especially in terms of financing medical institutions, medicines and other items.

The bill 6327 [10], which still is a draft (the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine will consider it no earlier than September 2017), provides for the introduction of full funding from the state budget at the level of primary (general practitioner) and emergency (emergency care), as well as palliative care. According to the estimates by the Ministry of Health the amount is approximately 80% of all possible expenses of people for medicine [8].

Reformation of the health care system should solve the problem of optimizing budget flows. Also, the proposed changes will make it possible to engage non-state-owned healthcare facilities to the provision of medical services at the expense of budgetary funds.

In our opinion, since there is no single norm that in practical terms should ensure access to free medicine in Ukraine, delaying reformation of the healthcare system is illogical and irresponsible.

**6. Ineffective housing and utility policies.** Unsatisfactory technical condition of housing and utility services is due to the high level of depreciation of fixed assets in this sub-sector – 62.2%. Housing facilities stock which is represented by the houses of the first mass series (built in the 1960-1970s) occupy the area of about 72 million square meters. Those houses require replacement or reconstruction. In fact, every fourth urban resident lives in accommodation with unsatisfactory technical conditions, poor functional quality and have exhausted their service life.

15.7% of the total extent of the heating networks are unserviceable and dangerous to use. Thermal energy waste in the housing facilities stock equals 30% and in external networks – up to 25%.

44% of energy resources are consumed by the housing and utilities sector of Ukraine, which accounts for about 30% of the total fuel consumption in Ukraine. At the same time, the cost of energy per unit of manufactured products and provided utility services is more than 1.5 times higher as compared to the respective foreign indicators. For reference, one inhabitant in the existing buildings with centralized heat supply in Ukraine consumes 1.4 tons of conventional fuel per year to heat 1 square meter of accommodation, which is 1.5 times more than in the USA and 2.5-3 times more than in Sweden.

Irrational and inefficient use of fuel and energy resources by housing and utilities enterprises is one of the most pressing issues of the industry.

Water and sewage pumping stations and wastewater treatment facilities in all the regions of Ukraine also show considerable physical and moral deterioration. Considering total extent of networks, 37% of the water supply networks require replacement and 34.8% of sewage networks need the same. The volume of water losses and unmetered drinking water at the water supply and sewage facilities in the cities of Ukraine exceeds 30% and in some cases may reach 60% of the water fed to the system. Due to outdated equipment, non-optimal operation of pumping stations and the loss of drinking

water during transportation and distribution, unproductive costs of electricity on the national average equal 25%. Therefore, water supply and sewage networks require major upgrades, improving operating procedure, equipment replacement etc.

The top-priority course of accelerated reformation of housing and communal services is the implementation of an effective energy saving policy. According to experts, implementation of energy saving measures in the housing and utilities sectors makes it possible to reduce gas consumption by the average of 22% while manufacturing, transportation and supply of heat energy in the system of housing and utilities services; it also enables reducing electricity consumption by 15-20% in water supply and drainage systems [5].

The condition of infrastructure objects causes significant internal development constraints. Particularly pressing issue in recent years is the condition of roads, the driving on which should be considered not just in terms of reducing the logistics efficiency of economic entities, but above all as a threat to the safety of people, both drivers and passengers.

Ukraine needs to seek solutions to the key issues and challenges that have been argued above. It is impossible to solve the corresponding tasks with the help of merely technological instrumentarium.

What we lack is the reformation strategy, which can comprehensively cover all areas of economic, social and technological modernization.

Achievement of sustainable economic development and ensuring high standards of living / quality of life will depend on the efficiency and accomplishment of solution approaches to many problems.

Effective reformation of Ukrainian economy, implementation of profound structural reforms with qualitative upgrading of goods production, market and social infrastructure are possible only after technological modernization. The inability of the country to conduct structural reorganization of national economy in accordance with the requirements of the new technological paradigm or delaying such structural changes not only hinders its development, but also leads to economic crisis, widens the gap in their growth in relation to the countries, which are successful in implementing such changes.

Issues dealing with socio-economic growth of Ukraine need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The problem of social security cannot be solved without ensuring economic growth and economic development. It is impractical to separate models of endogenous from models of exogenous growth since economic and social development is under the influence of endogenous and exogenous factors, it varies on the degree of manageability and controllability, and it is driven by a system of state regulation of socio-economic processes (for more details see [1]).

As a matter of actual practice, decisions are often ill-grounded, without a proper level of validation and consideration of the possibilities and consequences of their implementation.

In our view, the process of regulating social and economic development requires switching from isolation of budget and structural balance to their integration. Firstly, the budget structural balance implies the definition of budgetary relations and parameters of national economy taking into account the necessary structural changes in the socioeconomic field, which in actual practice is often ignored (when budget planning is done without sound technical and economic assessment of economic, environmental, technical and technological etc. possibilities and consequences of subsystem funding). Secondly, such an integration approach provides an opportunity to mutually coordinate the implementation of plans, programs of economic development and social security with budget and resources, including the possibility of attracting investments. As a matter of practice, they frequently fail to abide by such a requirement. For example, decisions are made without proper technical and economic assessment of the possibilities and consequences of their implementation. Accordingly, in the absence of the necessary amount of budgetary funding of socioeconomic programs, there is a budget deficit allowed for or, subsequently, such programs will not be implemented.

In order to balance the interests of the subsystems and the subjects, there must be scientifically substantiated and balanced approach to the procedure of allocating budgetary funds on the basis of relevant grounds and appropriate calculations, as well as valid priorities of socioeconomic development of the country.

The interdependence between donor and acceptor subsystems needs to be studied in their structural and functional interconnection.

Management of socioeconomic processes should be based on the integration of financial and economic approaches that will enable the structural budget balance of socioeconomic development and the conceptual structural and functional interconnection between the donor (economic) and the acceptor (social) subsystems to ensure the structural and functional equation, rational distribution of financial assets through investments into the development of the economy, infrastructure, and for social needs (for more details see [3]).

Given the current conditions, Ukraine needs to modernize all the aspects of its activities; to make prompt, but well-considered decisions, to take decisive steps to ensure the facilities for the development of the economy, human rights and freedoms support, and to lay the groundwork for solving the tasks of achieving civilized rules and standards of living, quality of life for Ukrainian population.

Systemic reforms and transformations in all spheres of economy and people's livelihoods, the system of means for regulating social and economic processes should be based on the strategic vision of the directing marks of economic growth. It is necessary to ensure the competitiveness of the national economy and sustainable socioeconomic growth through the establishment of an innovative model of economic development, structural adjustment,

modernization of infrastructure and principal industries of the economy, expansion of energy, agro-industrial complex, etc.; modernizing the public finance management system by improving business environment, boosting investment and innovation activities, deregulating economic activity and counteracting corruption; decentralization. The state's structural policy should be redirected from providing support to inefficient businesses to infrastructure development, ensuring labor mobility, human potential support and involvement and ensuring the facilities for personal fulfilment.

Social transformations should maintain the necessary social stability as a factor of reducing business risks, reproducing intellectual capital, reducing social inequality.

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