

3

**INCLUSIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION OF UKRAINE:
PERCEPTION OF CULTURE, POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the perception of inclusiveness in Ukrainian higher education institutions, analyzing the culture, policies and practices that aim to create a more open and diverse educational environment. In the context of global efforts to promote sustainable development and achieve its goals, the article examines how inclusive higher education initiatives can respond to contemporary challenges by promoting equal access to quality education for all higher education seekers, including vulnerable groups. On the basis of a large-scale study, conducted among students of higher education of various specialties and levels of study (a total of 4,436 people) and employees of higher education institutions, including administrative, teaching and support staff (a total of 821 people), the authors identify key barriers and opportunities for improving inclusiveness in Ukrainian universities, through the prism of indicators "Inclusive culture in higher education", "Inclusive policy in higher education" and "Inclusive practices in higher education", emphasizing the importance of integrated approaches that contribute to quality education and ensure sustainable development of society. The authors offer recommendations for improving inclusive culture, policies, and practices, emphasizing the need for resource support and curriculum flexibility to meet diverse educational needs.

KEYWORDS

Ukraine, war, inclusiveness, inclusive education, higher education, universities, sustainable development, vulnerable categories, institution of higher education, inclusive educational environment; Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Quality Education".

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The global context of higher education in the modern world is undergoing significant transformations, aimed at solving complex and urgent challenges of today. In this process, an important role is played by the UNESCO initiative "Education 2030", which provides for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, it focuses on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which calls for inclusive and quality education for all, paying particular attention to the needs of vulnerable populations, emphasizing the importance of education as a key factor contributing to sustainable development and the ability of each person to realize his/her full potential [1].

Inclusiveness in higher education encompasses a much wider range of aspects than just meeting international standards or removing barriers to access to education. It involves providing conditions that promote the presence, active participation and success of students in the educational process, regardless of their social status, ethnic origin, or physical and mental capabilities [2]. It is about the desire to create such an educational environment of a higher education institution, where every student of higher education has equal opportunities to develop their abilities and achieve academic success, guaranteeing the acceptance of diversity and the right of every participant in the educational process to the opportunity to realize their potential both academically and personally [3]. This approach involves the active inclusion and support of all learners, taking into account their individual needs and characteristics, which is the foundation for the development of inclusive education [4].

This need becomes even more important in war-affected areas, where education can serve as a vital tool for the healing and rehabilitation of war-affected beneficiaries [5]. In conflict conditions, educational institutions face a number of challenges that require non-standard solutions and flexibility to ensure access to quality education, which in conflict conditions not only contributes to the restoration of normal life, but also plays a key role in the processes of peacemaking and reconstruction of society [6].

It should be noted that conflicts such as the ongoing war in Ukraine not only changed the socio-political environment, but also deeply affected the higher education sector [7]. The full-scale war in Ukraine has different effects on the realization of the rights to education, declared in international and state documents [8]. A serious challenge is the significant increase in the number of representatives of various vulnerable categories of the population and the impact on their life and education [9]. The situation is especially difficult for those who are in temporarily occupied territories or in the zone of active hostilities, where every day becomes a struggle for survival [10]. Similarly, serious problems arise for persons who remain in their homes, far from the immediate conflict, as well as for internally displaced persons who seek safety and stability in other regions of the country [11, 12]. No less important are the challenges for persons forced to go abroad, where they face the need to adapt to new educational systems, language barriers and cultural differences [13]. Those in de-occupied territories, as well as those living in close proximity to war zones, face their own set of challenges, including the destruction of educational infrastructure and interruptions in the educational process [14].

In this context, for the system of higher education of Ukraine, it becomes a priority to define and implement strategic guidelines, aimed at ensuring quality education that meets modern challenges [15]. The search for effective mechanisms that would guarantee equal access to education for all citizens, especially from vulnerable categories, becomes a key task [16]. This includes analyzing the specific needs of each group and developing specific supports that take into account the unique circumstances of each learner [17].

Accordingly, there is an urgent need to review and adapt university approaches to inclusiveness in the educational environment. This means a transition from a simple guarantee of quality to

a culture of quality education that takes into account the diversity of students' needs and creates conditions for their full development and integration [18]. This approach allows not only to respond to immediate challenges, but also lays the foundation for sustainable development of the educational system in the long term.

In addition, the issue of inclusiveness becomes more acute in the context of the integration of the national education system into the European space of higher education, in which inclusion is defined as one of the key priorities [19], and the need to develop and establish inclusiveness standards in modern educational institutions (Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for 2021–2027 (Brussels, 2020)) [20]. In addition, the modern realities of the war in Ukraine showed the whole world the need for clear and unwavering observance of the rights of every person, since the leveling and ignoring of these rights can lead to negative social consequences, which emphasizes the importance of building a society based on respect for the rights of each individual. The educational system, in turn, must be designed in such a way as to promote and implement the ideals of inclusiveness at every stage of the educational process, the principles and obligations of which are laid down in a number of international documents (Universal Declaration of Rights of the United Nations (1948) [21], the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) [22], the Standard Rules for Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) [23], the Salamanca Declaration on Principles, Policies and Practices in Education with special needs and its Framework for Action (1994) [24], the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development (1995) [25], the Dakar Framework for Action "Education for All: Fulfilling our Collective Commitments" (2000) [26], the Incheon Declaration "Education 2030": The concept of education development until 2030 (2015) [27]), which provides for certain measures to increase public awareness of equal rights to education for all and to create such conditions in the education system.

In Ukraine, the right to obtain high-quality higher education is defined by the Constitution (Article 53), the Law "On Education" (Article 19), "On Higher Education" (Article 32, Article 62), the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine for 2022–2032, adopted by Order No. 286-r of the CMU dated 23.02.2022. The implementation and dissemination of the practice of inclusive education in higher education institutions (HEI) in Ukraine is regulated by the Resolution of the CMU "On the Procedure for Organizing Inclusive Education in Higher Education Institutions" dated July 10, 2019.

Considering the importance of inclusiveness in higher education, which requires universities not only to have a deep understanding and creation of an inclusive educational environment, but also to actively apply practices that meet the needs and take into account the diversity of the student community, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis of existing conditions [28]. This means that higher education institutions must not only design and provide educational services that meet the individual capabilities and needs of higher education students, supporting their academic and personal development, but also constantly reassess and adapt their organizational culture, policies and practices to support diversity [29].

With this in mind, the purpose of the study is to identify the level of inclusiveness of the educational environment in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ukraine from the point of view of perception and evaluation by HEI students and employees, culture, policy and practices, as well as to reveal the main challenges and directions for improvement.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

Determination of the perception and assessment of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of higher education institutions in Ukraine was carried out in accordance with the criteria of inclusiveness [30]. The standardized approach "Index of Inclusion" by T. Booth and M. Ainscow [31] was taken as a basis. The Inclusion Index is an approach to educational development that focuses on criteria such as culture, institutional policies, and practices that ensure equity, diversity, and barrier-free access to quality educational services for all participants in the educational process. The index of inclusion as a diagnostic tool helps to measure the level of inclusiveness in the educational environment, allowing to analyze both general and specific aspects related to the accessibility of education, taking into account diversity, as well as creating conditions for equal opportunities in learning and development of all participants in the educational process [32].

The tool for analyzing the inclusiveness of the educational environment in higher education institutions (HEIs) is based on six indicators of the Index: creating a community, promoting inclusive values, developing a university for everyone, organizing support and care for diversity, managing the educational process and mobilizing resources. A study, conducted by A. De la Herrán, J. Paredes, D. V. Monsalve, first proposed such an approach to the assessment of inclusiveness in universities [33]. This study is complemented by the work of C. Márquez et al., which focuses on "Assessment of inclusion in higher education using indicators", offering a detailed analysis of the use of indicators to assess inclusion in the educational environment [34].

The diagnostic tool "Index of Inclusion" was adapted according to the Ukrainian context and the specifics of the two target groups of the study: students of higher education and employees of higher education institutions (management, academic and support staff). The adaptation of the "Index of Inclusion" questionnaire to the Ukrainian context involved taking into account the specifics of the higher education system in Ukraine, cultural features, as well as specific challenges, faced by participants in the educational process. The involvement of two target groups provided a study of the perception and evaluation of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of higher educational institutions from different positions, which allowed to provide a deeper understanding of the problem and to identify key aspects that need improvement.

Conducting a study of the perception and evaluation of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of Ukrainian higher education institutions involved a sequential data collection procedure. Starting with the creation of a questionnaire in the Google Forms web service, the research took into account all the necessary questions related to the inclusiveness of the educational environment.

Clear and detailed instructions were included in the questionnaire for the participants of the two target groups of the study, which was intended to ensure uniformity of the procedure and avoid errors in understanding the tasks.

15 students of higher education of various specialties and courses of study and 17 employees of higher education institutions, including administrative, teaching and support staff, were selected for pilot testing. The participants were given detailed instructions for completing the questionnaire and asked to provide feedback on the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions, as well as the time, required to complete the questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed to identify possible problems with the wording of the questions. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were used, including open-ended comments from the participants on each question. Based on feedback, some changes were made to the wording of questions that caused difficulty in understanding to ensure greater clarity, and duplicate questions were removed to reduce the overall time to complete the questionnaire.

After making all the changes, the final version of the questionnaire was created. It included 42 questions, divided into three main sections: "Inclusive culture in HEIs", "Inclusive policies in HEIs" and "Inclusive practices in HEIs". The Inclusive Culture dimension included statements related to building the community (8 items) and promoting inclusive values (7 items). The Inclusive Policy dimension included statements about the university's openness to all (6 items) and support for diversity (9 items). The Inclusive Practices indicator included statements about adaptation of curricula and courses (4 items), engagement in learning (5 items), and availability of resources (3 items). To evaluate the answers to these questions, a six-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (6) was used. This scale facilitated a fine-grained analysis of the levels of inclusiveness, segmented into "minimum", "acceptable" and "optimal" based on aggregate points: the sum of points from 0 to 125 points is the minimum level; the sum of points from 126 to 209 points is acceptable; the sum of points from 210 to 252 points is optimal.

The questionnaire was distributed through various channels of communication with Ukrainian higher education institutions, including the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Stratified random sampling was used to select participants to ensure equal and fair representation of different groups. The participants were selected based on pre-defined criteria. In order to ensure the representativeness and objectivity of our study, two criteria were applied to the selection of participants from among those obtaining higher education: study status (the participant must be a student of a Ukrainian higher education institution at the time of the study, studying at a bachelor's, master's or postgraduate level) and the geographical location of the higher education institution (the sample must include higher education students from different regions of Ukraine in order to cover regional peculiarities). The criteria for the selection of participants among employees of higher education institutions were: staff category (management, academic and support staff), position and work experience in higher education institutions (the sample had employees with different work experience, from beginners to experienced employees, to analyze possible differences in the perception of inclusiveness depending on experience).

During the study of the perception and evaluation of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of higher education institutions, ethical standards were strictly observed to ensure the rights and safety of the participants. This meant that before data collection began, each participant was informed about the purpose of the study, the potential use of the results, ensuring full transparency. We have ensured confidentiality by stating that all data collected will be processed anonymously and the results will be presented in such a way as to make it impossible to identify individuals. In addition, the participants were given a clear understanding of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to themselves. In accordance with these ethical principles, we also ensured that the participants gave informed consent, confirming that they fully understood the aims of the study and agreed to the terms of participation. This approach not only strengthened the ethical basis of our research, but also contributed to the creation of trust and openness between the researchers and the participants, ensuring high quality and reliability of the data collected.

The survey lasted from October to December 2023 inclusive. After completing the collection procedure, the answers received were analyzed and saved for further scientific use. Descriptive statistics methods were used to analyze the data obtained as a result of the study of the perception and assessment of the inclusiveness of the educational environment in Ukrainian higher education institutions. This involved calculating mean values for quantitative data. Data visualizations, including histograms, were also used to help illustrate the distribution of scores. This approach not only allowed us to effectively summarize large volumes of data, but also to reveal the main trends and problems, which contributed to a deeper understanding of the perception and assessment of inclusiveness, and also allowed us to determine potential directions for building an inclusive educational environment.

3.3 INCLUSIVENESS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH THE EYES OF STUDENTS AND EMPLOYEES

3.3.1 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The total number of higher education students who participated in the study is 4,436 (**Table 3.1**).

Year of study. Among the respondents, the largest number are persons studying at the first (bachelor) level of higher education – 79.3 % ($n = 3516$), of which 1–2 years – 48.9 % ($n = 2170$), 3–4 years – 30.4 % ($n = 1349$). 19.9 % ($n = 883$) of the respondents obtain a higher education at the second (master's) level and 0.8 % (34 persons) are representatives of the third (educational and scientific) level of higher education. The analysis of the educational experience of this group of respondents indicates a significant interest in the problem of inclusion among bachelor's students who are at different stages of obtaining higher education. In

addition, the participation of master's and postgraduate students in the survey makes it possible to take into account the opinion regarding the evaluation of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of higher education institutions among students of different levels of higher education.

● **Table 3.1** General information about the survey participants among higher education seekers

Indicator		<i>N</i>	%
Year of study	1–2 years of the first (bachelor) level of higher education	2170	48.9
	3–4 year of the first (bachelor) level of higher education	1349	30.4
	Master	883	19.9
	Postgraduate	34	0.8
Identification with representatives of a certain group (several answers are possible)	A person with a disability	90	2.0
	A person with disorders of psychophysical development	21	0.5
	A person representing ethnic minorities	20	0.5
	A person with a low socio-economic status	73	1.6
	A person with inappropriate sexual development (transgender, non-binary and others)	19	0.4
	A person who had experience of participating in military conflicts or became a victim of violence	75	1.7
	A person who has survived traumatic events or disasters	244	5.5
	Migrant	105	2.4
	Internally displaced person	987	22.3
	A person from different geographical regions (for example, rural youth)	279	6.3
	A person belonging to sexual minorities (LGBTQ+)	136	3.1
	An elderly person who wants to continue his/her education	19	0.4
	A person who is resuming his/her education after a long break/retraining or without previous education	187	4.2
	A person from vulnerable groups (little or no support from family, orphan, frequent change of educational institutions, mental health, pregnancy, lack of time to study due to the need to earn a living by working or caring for someone)	176	4
	With none	2500	56.4
	Another option	281	6.3

Identification with a vulnerable group. Among the respondents, the majority do not identify themselves as a representative of a vulnerable category – 56.3 % ($n = 2500$). In the context of this study, the part of the respondents who consider themselves to be a representative of one

or more vulnerable categories is of particular interest – 43.7 % ($n = 1936$). The most represented vulnerable groups among the study participants are internally displaced persons (IDPs) – 22.3 % ($n = 987$). This is due to the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine and the forced displacement of a significant number of people (as of October 31, 2023, the number of IDPs is 3,527,731) [35]. Less pronounced groups of respondents are: persons from different geographical regions – 6.3 % ($n = 279$); persons who survived traumatic events or disasters – 5.5 % ($n = 244$); persons resuming their education after a long break/retraining or without previous education – 4.2 % ($n = 187$); persons from vulnerable population groups – 4 % ($n = 176$); persons belonging to sexual minorities – 3.1 % ($n = 136$); migrants – 2.3 % ($n = 104$); persons with disabilities – 2 % ($n = 90$). Other vulnerable groups are represented by less than 2 %, in particular: persons with low socio-economic status – 1.6 % ($n = 73$); persons who had experience of participating in military conflicts or became victims of violence – 1.7 % ($n = 75$); persons representing ethnic minorities – 0.5 % ($n = 21$); persons with disorders of psychophysical development – 0.5 % ($n = 21$); persons with inappropriate sexual development – 0.4 % ($n = 19$); elderly people who want to continue their education – 0.4 % ($n = 19$). A certain part of higher education students identify themselves as representatives of other vulnerable categories – 6.3 % ($n = 281$). The analysis of the presented data indicates a significant diversity of higher education students, involved in the research, as well as interest in the problem of inclusion among undergraduate students and representatives of vulnerable categories. Note that despite a small number of representatives of some vulnerable categories, taking into account their special educational needs is the foundation of building an inclusive educational space of higher education institutions. Therefore, it is important to take this diversity into account when formulating inclusive policies and practices, aimed at ensuring equal and barrier-free opportunities for obtaining quality higher education.

The next target group of the study is the staff of higher education institutions. The total number of respondents of this group was 821 people (Table 3.2).

● **Table 3.2** General information about the survey participants among the staff of HEI

Indicator		<i>N</i>	%
1		2	3
Category	HEI management	75	9.1
	HEI academic staff	631	76.9
	HEI support staff	115	14
Position	Professor	113	13.8
	Associate professor	340	41.4
	Senior teacher	77	9.4
	Teacher	50	6.1
	Scientific employee	3	0.4

**REDEFINING HIGHER EDUCATION:
INNOVATION, INCLUSION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DURING WARTIME**

Continuation of Table 3.2

1		2	3
	Assistant	45	5.5
	Other HEI employees	193	23.5
Identification with representatives of a certain group (several answers are possible)	A person with a disability	35	4.3
	A person with disorders of psychophysical development	1	0.1
	A person representing ethnic minorities	8	1
	A person with a low socio-economic status	19	2.3
	A person with inappropriate sexual development (transgender, non-binary and others)	2	0.2
	A person who had experience of participating in military conflicts or became a victim of violence	26	3.1
	A person who has survived traumatic events or disasters	88	10.3
	Migrant	32	3.9
	Internally displaced person	195	23.8
	A person from different geographical regions (for example, rural youth)	22	2.7
	A person belonging to sexual minorities (LGBTQ+)	8	1.0
	An elderly person who wants to continue his/her education	10	1.2
	A person who is resuming his/her education after a long break/retraining or without previous education	13	1.6
	A person from vulnerable groups (little or no support from family, orphan, frequent change of educational institutions, mental health, pregnancy, lack of time to study due to the need to earn a living by working or caring for someone)	15	1.8
	With none	451	54.9
	Another option	49	6
Work experience in HEI	0–5 years	180	21.9
	6–10 years	71	8.6
	11–20 years	213	25.9
	21–25 years	140	17.1
	26–30 years	77	9.4
	More than 30 years	140	17.1
Experience in working with persons with special educational needs	Have	322	39.2
	Don't have	449	60.6

Category of HEI employees. The target group of the personnel of HEI is represented by three main categories: management of HEI, which is 9.1 % of the respondents ($n = 75$); academic (76.9 %; $n = 631$) and support staff (14 %; $n = 14$). This variety of respondents is important for a deep understanding of the readiness of different categories of internal stakeholders to build an inclusive educational environment of HEIs. Each of the categories of the organizational structure of higher education institutions – "management", "academic staff" and "support staff" – represents a separate segment that defines different job duties regarding the provision of educational space. The "Management" category includes administrative positions at various levels of the hierarchy of higher education institutions, such as the rector, deans, heads of structural units. Their responsibilities include strategic management, development and monitoring of institutional policies, decision-making, work coordination and monitoring. Academic staff includes teachers, scientists and other personnel, involved in the educational process and scientific research. Their responsibilities include teaching, research, educational design, graduate advising, and other academic functions. The category "support staff" includes specialists who provide technical, administrative and other support to all participants of the educational process.

Position. Among the respondents, quantitative indicators were distributed as follows: professors make up 13.8 %; associate professors are the most represented group, 41.4 %; senior teachers (9.4 %) and teachers (6.1 %); scientific employees (0.4 %), assistants (5.5 %) and other employees of higher education institutions (23.5 %). These data show the diversity among the survey participants.

Identification with a vulnerable group. Among the respondents, the majority do not identify themselves as a representative of a vulnerable category (54.9 %; $n = 451$). The most represented groups of participants in this survey are internally displaced persons (23.8 %; $n = 195$); persons who survived traumatic events or disasters (10.3 %; $n = 88$); persons with disabilities (4.3 %; $n = 35$); migrants (3.9 %; $n = 32$) and persons who had experience of participating in military conflicts or became victims of violence (3.1 %; $n = 26$). A certain part of the survey participants identifies themselves as a representative of other vulnerable categories (6 %; $n = 49$). Less than 3 % of respondents are representatives of such vulnerable categories as: persons from different geographical regions (2.7 %; $n = 22$); persons with low socio-economic status (2.3 %; $n = 19$); representatives of ethnic minorities (1 %; $n = 8$). The analysis of the presented data regarding the identification of respondents with different vulnerable groups indicates the importance of taking into account the needs and experiences of these groups when perceiving and evaluating the inclusiveness of the educational environment of higher education institutions. Taking into account these aspects, the formation of an inclusive culture of higher education institutions should take into account diversity and recognize the uniqueness of each participant in the educational process, contributing to the creation of such an environment that supports diversity and equal opportunities for everyone – from students to the management of higher education institutions.

Professional experience. The distribution of the research participants by the length of their professional experience in higher education institutions indicates that 21.9 % ($n = 180$) of people have from 0 to 5 years of experience; 8.6 % ($n = 71$) – from 6 to 10 years; 25.9 % ($n = 213$) – from 11 to 20 years; 17.1 % ($n = 140$) – from 21 to 25 years; 9.4 % ($n = 77$) are between 26 and 30 years, and 17.1 % ($n = 140$) have more than 30 years of professional experience in the field of higher education. These data indicate the diversity of the length of professional experience among the study participants, which may be an important factor in analyzing the results and generalizing the study's conclusions.

Experience in working with vulnerable groups. Analyzing data on the respondents' experience in working with people with special educational needs, it can be determined that the vast majority of the participants (60.6 %; $n = 449$) do not have such experience, while 39.2 % ($n = 322$) of the participants have relevant experience. It is important to consider this context when perceiving and evaluating the inclusiveness of an educational environment, as it may influence their perception and evaluation of an existing culture, policies and practices. The individuals who already have relevant experience may be more aware of the needs and challenges related to the inclusion of persons with special educational needs in the educational process. They may have a realistic view of inclusive practices and a desire to actively contribute to the creation of an inclusive educational environment. On the other hand, the respondents who do not have experience working with persons with special educational needs may show less awareness and understanding of these needs and challenges, be more prone to generalizations or stereotypes.

3.3.2 INCLUSIVE CULTURE OF HEIS

One of the criteria for perception and assessment of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of a higher education institution is an inclusive culture (**Table 3.3**). This criterion reflects cooperation and support for the values of diversity and equality, which are the basis for creating a comfortable, safe and barrier-free educational environment, in which everyone feels included, accepted and valued regardless of their characteristics.

The first indicator of this criterion – community for cooperation – is focused on the actions of community members that contribute to the involvement of everyone in the process of active interaction. Analyzing this indicator, it is possible to notice certain trends regarding the perception and evaluation of the community for cooperation by different target groups. On the one hand, the majority of the higher education students (70.1 %) and management, academic and support staff (71.5 %) believe that their HEIs have reached an optimal level in creating a collaborative community, which is a positive signal of positive perception and evaluation of the inclusiveness of the educational environment. This shows that the higher education community is ready to take into account the diversity and needs of its members (including vulnerable categories) on the basis of mutual understanding and the realization of equality in access to quality educational services.

At the same time, the presence of acceptable and minimum levels is a cause for concern. Thus, 25.2 % of the higher education students and 24.5 % of the higher education employees feel that their higher education institutions embody this aspect of inclusiveness at an acceptable level. Even more alarming is that a certain number of respondents of both target groups perceive and value HEIs as a community for cooperation at a minimal level: 4.7 % and 4 % for the higher education students and the management, academic and support staff, respectively. This indicates a low level of trust and limited interaction, and also indicates a lack of communication and mutual understanding between the participants of the educational process. In the case when the community is perceived as an unfavorable educational environment for cooperation, it is worth talking about non-transparency or insufficient openness for the participation of all participants in the educational process, as well as the use of ineffective mechanisms for attracting internal stakeholders (students of higher education, academic and support staff) to participation and cooperation.

● **Table 3.3** Perception and assessment of the inclusive culture of HEIs by the target groups of the study

Level	Target groups	Indicators by the criterion "Inclusive culture"			
		Community for collaboration		Inclusive values	
		%	N	%	N
Optimal	Higher education students	70.1	3109	73.7	3 271
	HEI employees	71.5	587	76.6	629
Acceptable	Higher education students	25.2	1117	21.4	949
	HEI employees	24.5	201	20	164
Minimal	Higher education students	4.7	210	4.9	216
	HEI employees	4	33	3.4	28

That is, the obtained data indicate that a certain part of Ukrainian HEIs still has difficulties in creating and maintaining such cooperation among the university community, in which diversity and cooperation between different participants of the educational process, in particular vulnerable ones, is the norm. This situation may be related to systemic problems, general culture, lack of resources or inadequate understanding of the importance of inclusion in higher education.

The existence of certain differences in perception and evaluation between higher education students and management, academic and support staff is also an important aspect. On the one hand, this is a reflection of the difference in experience and expectations, because higher education students may, to some extent, be less aware of the efforts, implemented at the institutional level to ensure the inclusiveness of the educational environment. On the other hand, management, academic and support staff, who are directly or indirectly involved in the management and organizational activities of HEIs, may have a more optimistic view of the overall situation.

The obtained data indicate the need to focus the efforts of higher education institutions on raising the level of awareness and active involvement to the development of an inclusive educational environment based on the cooperation of all participants of the educational process. This may include holding information events, as well as creating more open and accessible communication channels between different groups of participants in the educational process with the mandatory involvement of representatives of various vulnerable groups.

The next indicator of the "inclusive culture" criterion is inclusive values that serve as the foundation for creating an educational environment, in which everyone can feel valued and included, regardless of their characteristics or differences. Inclusive values should not just be declared by higher education institutions, but also reflected in real actions – from teaching methods, approaches to learning and assessment, to cultural activities, as well as in administrative processes. This allows for the integration of inclusive values into the culture of HEIs in such a way that every member of the community has the opportunity and takes responsibility for participating in their implementation by creating mechanisms to involve stakeholders in the process of supporting inclusion.

The analysis of the obtained results regarding the perception and assessment of inclusive values in Ukrainian higher education institutions indicates certain trends between higher education students and management, academic and support staff of higher education institutions. Thus, 73.7 % of the higher education students and 76.6 % of the management, academic and support staff believe that their HEIs actively spread inclusive values at an optimal level. These indicators are quite close, which may indicate the general recognition and nurturing of inclusive values in the educational environment of higher education institutions.

21.4 % of the higher education students and 20 % of the management, academic and support staff believe that inclusive values are implemented at an acceptable level, that is, inclusive values are generally accepted in the educational environment, but their implementation and impact on the real educational experience of the participants of the educational process does not always correspond expectations. Such similarities may indicate the same challenges both groups face in creating a culture that supports diversity and equality in the pursuit of quality higher education.

At the same time, 4.9 % of the higher education students and 3.4 % of the management, academic and support staff are convinced that the spread of inclusive values in the educational environment of higher education institutions is at a minimal level. This indicates that inclusive values are not properly implemented in the educational space of higher education institutions. Such views on the part of students of higher education and management, academic and support staff can be an important signal about the level of readiness of HEIs to create an inclusive educational environment, i.e. indicate that individual HEIs do not take concrete measures to implement inclusive values, such as staff training, creation of adaptive programs and resources for various needs of higher education seekers, in particular vulnerable categories.

A certain difference in evaluations of inclusive values in the educational space of higher education institutions between the two target groups may reflect the difference in perspectives or

experiences between these two groups. Students of higher education, who are direct participants in the educational process, may have a more optimistic vision of these processes, while management, academic and support staff, often involved in the development and fulfilment of institutional policies, may be more critical as to the implementation of inclusive values in accordance with European standards and national strategies of inclusive education. In general, the fairly high scores of both groups testify to the successful implementation of inclusive values in the majority of Ukrainian higher education institutions. However, the existing difference in perception at the minimum and acceptable levels indicates the need for additional efforts to ensure the same understanding and implementation of inclusive values among all members of the HEI community.

Analyzing the criterion "inclusive culture" in Ukrainian higher education institutions (**Fig. 3.1**), the following general conclusions can be drawn. Both target groups of the study perceive and evaluate inclusive culture as optimal, recognizing it as a fundamental basis for creating a comfortable and barrier-free educational environment for all participants of the educational process, in particular vulnerable categories. The existing inclusive culture in Ukrainian higher education institutions is assessed as supporting diversity through promotion, understanding and creating conditions for equality between representatives of different groups of participants in the educational process. It also involves creating a community where higher education providers, management, academic and support staff interact and collaborate effectively to ensure the quality of higher education.

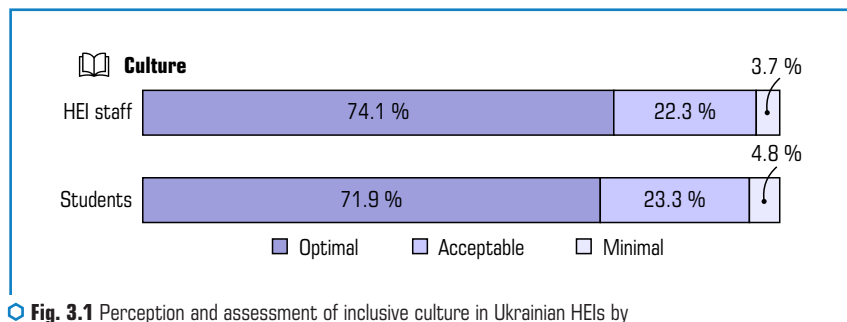


Fig. 3.1 Perception and assessment of inclusive culture in Ukrainian HEIs by the different target groups

At the same time, the existence of minimum and acceptable levels requires a more detailed analysis. This necessity is caused by the fact that an inclusive culture provides equal and barrier-free opportunities for every participant in the educational process, so focusing on the majority contradicts the very essence of inclusion. According to the results of the research of various target groups, the general picture indicates a sufficiently favorable educational environment of higher education institutions, where a culture of acceptance and respect for diversity prevails, conditions have been created for the inclusion of all groups in the educational process on equal rights.

Summarizing the presented results, it is worth emphasizing that different views may be the result of different management approaches regarding the openness of HEIs for different groups of participants in the educational process, educational practices, and cultural aspects, which indicates the importance of implementing better inclusive practices that are already available in certain HEIs, and systemic measures to support the inclusiveness of the educational environment of Ukrainian higher education institutions through the implementation of European standards for the formation of an inclusive culture in the educational space. This will help to form an inclusive culture in the educational space and ensure equal opportunities for all students of higher education and other participants in the educational process.

3.3.3 INCLUSIVE POLICY OF HEI

The next criterion for perception and assessment of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of a higher education institution is the inclusive institutional policy (**Table 3.4**). Inclusive institutional policies in universities are a key element in creating an environment that promotes equality, accessibility and diversity. Let's consider in more detail the two main indicators of this criterion.

● **Table 3.4** Perception and evaluation of the inclusive policy of HEI by the target groups of the study

Level	Target groups	Indicators by the criterion "inclusive policy"			
		University openness for everyone		Diversity support	
		%	N	%	N
Optimal	Higher education students	67.3	2986	68.3	3034
	HEI employees	65.8	540	58.9	484
Acceptable	Higher education students	26.2	1152	25.9	1145
	HEI employees	28.7	236	30.0	246
Minimal	Higher education students	6.5	288	5.8	257
	HEI employees	5.5	45	11.1	91

The university openness for everyone means creating conditions, under which every participant in the educational process has equal access to educational and scientific resources, opportunities for professional development, training and research [2]. This implies the existence of a legal framework that protects the rights and interests of all participants in the educational process and prevents discrimination. The effective implementation of such an approach requires not only the formation of relevant norms and rules, but also the monitoring of their compliance.

The analysis of the obtained data according to the indicator "openness of higher education institutions for everyone" in the context of inclusive institutional policy in Ukrainian higher education institutions indicates that 67.3 % of the higher education students and 65.8 % of the management, academic and support staff believe that the regulatory and legal framework allows to regulate the issue of ensuring the openness of HEIs, the provision of high-quality educational services at the optimal level. This indicates a general positive perception of the formal procedures of higher educational institutions, which determine the algorithm of actions to support the diversity and inclusiveness of the educational environment. At the acceptable level, the assessment of readiness is slightly different: 26.2 % of the higher education students and 28.7 % of the management, academic and support staff believe that the existing institutional policy of higher education partially meets the standards of openness. These data indicate that despite certain steps towards the openness of the educational environment for all, there are still some gaps that need attention. At a minimal, the difference between the perceptions of the higher education students (6.5 %) and the management, academic and support staff (5.5 %) is small. This may indicate that some higher education institutions still have significant difficulties in implementing effective inclusive institutional policies that would ensure equal opportunities and access to quality educational services for all, including vulnerable categories of higher education students.

The obtained data indicate that a significant number of Ukrainian higher education institutions are taking significant steps in the direction of regulating an inclusive educational environment on a regulatory and legal basis, however, the issue of regulating the accessibility and openness of the educational environment for all participants in the educational process, in particular vulnerable categories, remains an urgent task.

The next indicator of the "inclusive institutional policy" criterion is diversity support. This indicator includes the development and implementation of programs and strategies, aimed at meeting the educational needs of higher education seekers from among representatives of various vulnerable groups. This also includes the provision of special methodological materials, psychological and social support, the establishment of a mentoring system and other measures that help attract higher education seekers with different educational needs and capabilities to the academic life of the university.

The analysis of the received data according to this indicator demonstrates a significant difference in the perception and assessment of this aspect between the different target groups. Among the students of higher education, 68.3 % believe that support for diversity is at an optimal level, which indicates their general satisfaction with legal regulation, measures and initiatives of higher education institutions, aimed at supporting students of higher education with special educational needs. At an acceptable level, 25.9 % of the higher education students feel that their higher education institutions have reached this standard, and 5.8 % believe that legal regulation of diversity support is at a minimal level.

Among the management, academic and support staff, only 58.9 % believe that the legal regulation of this issue is at an optimal level, while 30 % and 11.1 % believe that it is at an acceptable

and minimum level, respectively. This assessment is lower than among higher education students, and to some extent indicates a more critical attitude of the staff of higher education institutions to the existing regulatory and legal framework on inclusion issues. This may also indicate that higher education students are less involved in the formal procedures that regulate the educational process. At the same time, management, academic and support staff must perform their professional functions within the limits, set by the regulatory framework of higher education institutions, where the algorithm and sequence of supporting the diversity of participants in the educational process must be clearly defined. That is why, they can be more aware of the challenges and disadvantages that exist in this matter.

Analyzing the average indicators according to the "inclusive policy" criterion (**Fig. 3.2**), the following conclusions can be drawn. The general trend is a relatively high level of satisfaction with the existing institutional policy of higher education institutions on inclusion. Both target groups of the study mostly perceive and evaluate the inclusive policy as optimal, recognizing the importance of a well-defined regulatory framework of higher education, which regulates and defines the algorithm for ensuring openness and supporting diversity in the educational space. The existing inclusive policy of HEIs is assessed as having clearly defined procedures to support diversity and equality in access to quality educational services. Both groups recognize the significant efforts, made by HEIs to support higher education students with special educational needs, which includes social, psychological, methodological support and the formation of individual educational plans. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to the difference in perception and evaluation by the different target groups in order to ensure a more holistic and effective approach to building an inclusive educational environment of HEIs. Higher education students are more satisfied with existing institutional policies, while management, academic and support staff have a critical attitude, because this target group believes that higher education institutions have achieved less success and have gaps in legal regulation of openness and support of diversity in the educational environment.

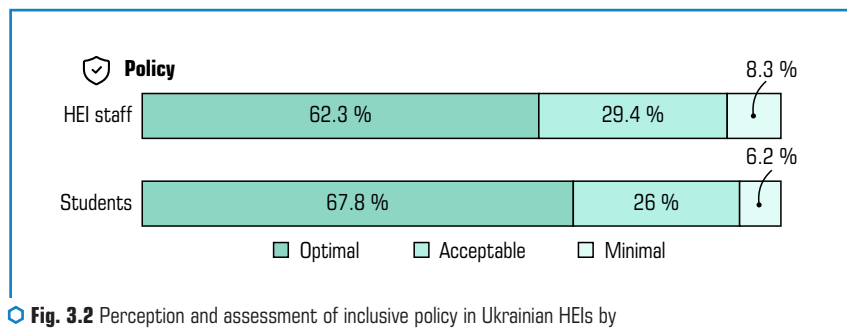


Fig. 3.2 Perception and assessment of inclusive policy in Ukrainian HEIs by the different target groups

The obtained results also indicate certain difficulties and challenges regarding the inclusive policy of higher education, in particular the ambiguity and insufficiency of the regulatory framework, as well as the criteria for ensuring the openness and accessibility of quality education for different categories of applicants; insufficient resources and support for participants in the educational process (in particular, social, psychological and methodical); lack of a unified approach to motivating staff to work with vulnerable categories of higher education seekers; the need to strengthen cooperation with external stakeholders; the need to develop institutional standards and specify inclusion mechanisms to ensure equal conditions for all applicants, taking into account their individual needs and capabilities.

In the conditions of the ongoing war in Ukraine, many higher education institutions have switched to an online education format, which introduces additional challenges to the existing institutional policy. This creates a need to adapt the legal framework to the diversity of the contingent and the availability of quality education. Both qualitative and quantitative expansion of representatives of vulnerable categories of participants in the educational process (both among applicants and among the staff of higher education institutions), such as internally displaced persons, migrants, persons who have experienced trauma or loss, require special attention and support. This poses the task of adapting the existing institutional policy to the new realities. There is also a need for a more holistic approach to the clear definition in the legal framework of issues related to inclusive education, in particular the regulation of social, psychological and methodical support, as well as the promotion of mutual understanding between different groups of participants in the educational process, in particular the involvement of vulnerable categories.

The implementation of an inclusive institutional policy requires the coordinated work of all structural divisions of the university, from management to teaching staff and student organizations. It is important to create mechanisms for feedback and monitoring the effectiveness of implemented measures. An urgent task for Ukrainian higher education institutions is also to create or support the activities of specialized services/departments/centers that will purposefully take care of the issue of supporting participants in the educational process from among vulnerable categories, as well as establishing effective cooperation with inclusive resource centers and external organizations, which can contribute to strengthening inclusive practices and ensuring equal access to quality educational services. In addition, an important aspect is the question of material and moral motivation of the staff of higher education institutions to work with students with special educational needs. Effective implementation of an inclusive policy depends on readiness and interest in the development and implementation of adapted educational programs, training courses and methods. All this requires a systematic approach and constant adaptation of educational strategies and institutional policies, as well as appropriate resource provision.

In general, there is a high level of awareness of the importance of inclusive policies in Ukrainian higher education institutions, although significant challenges remain, especially in the context of the ongoing full-scale war and changes in socio-economic conditions. At the same time, the obtained results cause some concern and emphasize the need for further improvement of the inclusive

institutional policy of higher education institutions to provide quality educational services to various groups of higher education seekers, particularly vulnerable categories. Special attention should be paid to the adaptation and expansion of the inclusive policy, which should be flexible and meet the new challenges and needs of all participants in the educational process in order to build an inclusive educational environment.

3.3.4 INCLUSIVE PRACTICES OF HEI

The third criterion for perception and evaluation of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of a higher education institution is inclusive practices. This criterion covers three main indicators: adaptation of educational programs, involvement in education and resources (Table 3.5).

● **Table 3.5** Perception and evaluation of the inclusive practices of HEI by the target groups of the study

Level	Target groups	Indicators by the criterion "Inclusive practices"					
		Adaptation of educational programs		Involvement in education		Resources	
		%	N	%	N	%	N
Optimal	Higher education students	70.5	3129	73.2	3245	70	3108
	HEI employees	68.5	562	77	632	50.8	416
Acceptable	Higher education students	23.1	1026	21.7	966	23.8	1054
	HEI employees	25.4	209	19.1	157	32.6	268
Minimal	Higher education students	6.4	281	5.1	225	6.2	274
	HEI employees	6.1	50	3.9	32	16.6	137

The first indicator, the adaptation of educational programs, focuses on ensuring the availability and involvement of all higher education seekers in mastering educational programs. This includes the flexibility of educational plans, courses, teaching and learning methods, and assessment to accommodate the different educational needs of higher education seekers, including those with special educational needs or reduced mobility. Effective adaptation ensures that no student experiences barriers in access to education and opportunities for obtaining quality higher education.

The obtained results indicate that the majority of both target groups, 70.5 % of the higher education students and 68.5 % of the management, academic and support staff of higher education institutions, believe that the adaptation of educational programs is at an optimal level.

This indicates the successful implementation of inclusive practices in the educational process to take into account the various needs of those seeking higher education. Despite the generally shared perception of the effectiveness of the adaptation of educational programs, a slight difference to some extent indicates a more critical vision of the adaptation processes based on the professional experience and understanding of educational processes. 23.1 % of the higher education applicants and 25.4 % of the management, academic and support staff of higher education institutions believe that the adaptation of educational programs is at an acceptable level. This assessment may indicate the presence of certain shortcomings or barriers in taking into account the needs and opportunities of higher education seekers from among vulnerable categories. Less represented is the group of respondents, 6.4 % of the higher education students and 6.1 % of the management, academic and support staff, who believe that the adaptation of educational programs takes place at a minimal level. This indicates significant difficulties regarding the integration of inclusive practices and the availability of educational services in such educational programs.

Despite the generally positive perception and assessment of the adaptation of educational programs, certain challenges, associated with insufficient flexibility and consideration of the various educational needs of all students, especially from among vulnerable categories, point to the need to adapt educational and methodological materials and teaching and learning methods to new conditions, especially for students who have experienced trauma or loss, migrants and internally displaced persons, as well as persons with disabilities and psychophysical disorders, which is one of the key tasks for the HEI community. In general, the obtained results testify to the significant progress of Ukrainian HEIs and the need to continue efforts to further improve inclusive practices.

The second indicator – involvement in education – evaluates the effectiveness of involvement of all higher education students in the educational process. This applies not only to the physical availability of classrooms and educational materials, but also to the creation of a psychologically comfortable environment where every student feels valued and able to influence the educational process.

The vast majority of the higher education students (73.2 %) and even more among the representatives of management, academic and support staff (77 %) believe that involvement in education is at an optimal level. This indicates the effective involvement of higher education seekers in the educational process, which takes into account individual capabilities and needs. The higher percentage of HEI academic staff who believes that involvement in education is optimal may be due to their role in the implementation of curricula and teaching and learning methods, so they may have a more positive view of the effectiveness of their work or a broader view of the efforts made in general. At an acceptable level, 21.7 % of the higher education students and 19.1 % of the management, academic and support staff feel that involvement in education is sufficient, but not optimal. This may indicate the presence of certain limitations or deficiencies in the teaching and learning of students with special educational needs. 5.1 % of the higher education applicants and

3.9 % of the management, academic and support staff believe that involvement in education is at a minimal level, which indicates significant challenges in the organization and implementation of an inclusive approach in teaching and learning.

Despite the generally positive perception and high appreciation of involvement in education, there are some challenges, especially in the context of online learning, the ongoing full-scale war. The need to adapt approaches to learning to take into account the educational needs of vulnerable categories of students requires further development of inclusive practices. A certain difference in the percentage distribution between the two target groups allows to conclude that the students of higher education more critically evaluate the available educational experience and interaction with the academic staff, because they directly experience the consequences of involvement (for example, the feeling of isolation, insufficient support or lack of individual approach). The obtained data indicate the importance of continuing and improving the involvement of students in education in Ukrainian higher education institutions, with a special emphasis on adaptation to the needs of various groups of higher education seekers.

The third indicator is resources to support an inclusive educational environment. This includes funding, the use of human resources (for example, training teachers in inclusive methods), as well as material resources (for example, the availability of specialized equipment for higher education students with special needs).

70 % of the higher education seekers believe that access to educational resources is at an optimal level, compared to 50.8 % of the management, academic and support staff of higher education institutions. This discrepancy is significant and may be due to the difference in perception and expectations between the two target groups. While higher education learners evaluate resources in terms of their immediate availability and usefulness to their educational experience, they may lack a full understanding of what resources they have access to under ideal conditions. While higher education workers more critically determine the resources they need to implement inclusive practices in the educational process when interacting with various groups of higher education seekers, particularly vulnerable categories. At the same time, the staff evaluates resources more objectively, taking into account the quality, quantity and long-term sustainability of these resources.

23.8 % of the higher education students and 32.8 % of the management, academic and support staff define the presence and availability of the necessary resources for the implementation of inclusive practices as acceptable. This difference may reflect greater awareness among academic staff of the necessary resources for inclusive education.

6.2 % of the higher education seekers and 16.6 % of the management, academic and support staff of higher education institutions believe that access to resources is at a minimal level. This significant difference may indicate that staff is more aware of resource constraints at some universities, particularly in the context of financial or other constraints.

In the context of building an inclusive educational environment, the difference in perception and assessment of the availability and accessibility of resources necessary for the implementation of inclusive practices is of particular concern. This is a testament to the existing challenges in ensuring

equal access to resources, such as special technical aids, assistive technologies, physical campus accessibility and accessible digital content. This indicates the need to improve the resource base of higher education institutions, especially to ensure quality higher education for vulnerable categories of higher education seekers.

Analyzing the obtained results according to the "inclusive practices" criterion, the following general conclusions, difficulties and challenges can be identified. Both target groups of the study perceive and evaluate inclusive practices as optimal (**Fig. 3.3**). The general trend is a positive perception of the existing practice of adapting educational programs, training courses, and teaching-methodical materials to the special educational needs of various groups of higher education seekers. This shows the flexibility and willingness of higher education institutions to provide barrier-free access to quality educational services. An inclusive way of learning, aimed at involving all students and guaranteeing equal access to educational opportunities, shows the desire to create a favorable educational environment for everyone. In addition, the effective allocation and use of resources, both financial and material, helps ensure support for all students, regardless of their diversity, affirming the commitment to an inclusive educational environment.

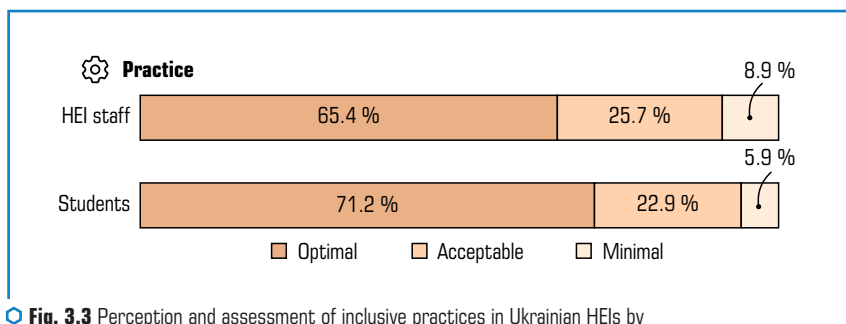


Fig. 3.3 Perception and assessment of inclusive practices in Ukrainian HEIs by the different target groups

At the same time, the presence of acceptable and minimal levels requires a more detailed analysis, as it may indicate certain systemic problems. In particular, there are challenges, associated with ensuring equal access to education for those seeking higher education, who require specialized resources to receive quality educational services. Despite the fact that most students of higher education are satisfied with the availability of resources, employees of higher education institutions often point to existing limitations. This indicates the need to improve the material and technical base, especially in terms of physical accessibility of campuses and digital content.

One of the main challenges is limited funding, which affects the ability of HEIs to provide the necessary resources and ensure the availability of adaptive technologies. Another important aspect is the education and training of academic and support staff to ensure the effective

implementation of inclusive teaching and learning methods, as well as the effective adaptation of educational programs, training courses and teaching-methodical materials, taking into account the special educational needs of different groups of higher education seekers, in particular representatives of vulnerable categories.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale war in Ukraine caused additional challenges, requiring rapid adaptation to online format and ensuring the availability of educational and methodological materials for all categories of students [36, 37]. It is important to pay special attention to the needs of higher education students, affected by war, internally displaced persons, migrants and other vulnerable groups. It is also important to provide effective psychological support for all participants in the educational process who are experiencing war-related stress and trauma.

3.3.5 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE INCLUSIVENESS OF THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF HEIS

The development of an inclusive educational space in Ukrainian higher education institutions requires an integrated approach that includes all aspects – from culture and policies to educational programs and resource availability [29]. This is a difficult and complex task that requires deep rethinking and open dialogue between all stakeholders to understand current needs and expectations [28]. The obtained results of the study indicate the presence of challenges regarding the development of an inclusive educational environment, in particular:

- the ambiguity and inadequacy of the regulatory framework of higher education institutions regarding the criteria for ensuring the openness and accessibility of quality education for various categories of higher education seekers, the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities of academic and support staff in the context of inclusive education, including responsibility for the implementation of inclusive approaches and methods based on clear European and national inclusion standards;
- insufficient resources and support for participants in the educational process (in particular, social, psychological and methodical);
- the need to establish effective cooperation with inclusive resource centers and external organizations to promote the strengthening of inclusive practices and ensure equal access to quality educational services;
- the need to develop institutional standards and specify inclusion mechanisms to ensure the same conditions for all applicants, taking into account their individual needs and capabilities, as well as monitoring procedures for meeting the special educational needs of applicants of higher education from among vulnerable categories, which requires a systematic approach and constant adaptation of educational strategies and institutional policy, as well as appropriate resource provision;

- the need to organize the activities of specialized services/departments/centers that will purposefully take care of the issue of supporting participants in the educational process from among vulnerable categories;
- insufficient infrastructure and limited resources, which are necessary to ensure the availability of educational opportunities for various groups of students, as well as limited funding for adaptation of educational institutions, provision of special equipment, and training of personnel;
- lack of teaching and methodical materials that take into account the special educational needs of certain vulnerable groups of participants in the educational process;
- insufficient level of professional training of academic and support staff on issues of inclusion in higher education, as well as systematic psychological and methodical support;
- insufficient level of adaptation of educational programs and methods of teaching and learning to the special educational needs of students from vulnerable categories, especially in the context of online learning, which became especially relevant during the pandemic and full-scale war in Ukraine;
- lack of active involvement of higher education seekers from among vulnerable categories in decision-making processes and the development of inclusive university policies;
- lack of a unified approach to motivating staff to work with vulnerable categories of higher education seekers.

The inclusiveness of the educational environment is not a one-time initiative, but a long-term process that requires constant monitoring, evaluation and adaptation to new challenges [3, 5]. Therefore, for the successful implementation of inclusive practices in Ukrainian higher education institutions, it is necessary to approach the solution of the above-mentioned challenges in a comprehensive manner. On the basis of the conducted study of the problem, certain recommendations can be formulated, focused on three key areas: inclusive culture, inclusive institutional policy, and inclusive practices, systematized in **Table 3.6**.

The application of these recommendations requires all participants in the educational process to be ready for changes, open to new ideas, and actively participate in creating an inclusive educational environment.

● **Table 3.6** Recommendations for overcoming challenges in the context of building an inclusive educational environment of HEIs

Direction name	Recommendation focus	Recommendation content
1	2	3
Inclusive culture	Increasing of awareness and commitment to inclusion	Development and implementation of comprehensive training programs for all participants in the educational process, including students of higher education, teachers, and administrative staff, to increase awareness of inclusive values and practices. Creating an educational environment where diversity is valued as a key resource for quality higher education

**REDEFINING HIGHER EDUCATION:
INNOVATION, INCLUSION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DURING WARTIME**

Continuation of Table 3.6

1	2	3
	Promotion of open dialogue	Creation of a platform for discussion of inclusion and diversity issues, including round tables, seminars and forums, so that all participants in the educational process can express their opinions and share experiences
Inclusive policy	Development and implementation of inclusive institutional policy	Development and systematic updating of institutional regulatory documents taking into account international standards and the specifics of the Ukrainian context, which transparently and clearly define and regulate the principles of accessibility, equality and diversity, as well as the mechanisms of their implementation
	Provision of resource support	Provision of adequate funding and resources for the implementation of inclusive initiatives. Creation of organizational and financial conditions for proper equipment of educational premises, access to assistive technologies, etc.
Inclusive practices	Adaptation of educational programs and methods	Development of flexible curricula and programs that take into account the individual educational needs of students of higher education. Providing teachers with access to educational resources and methodological materials that will help adapt teaching methods to ensure the inclusiveness of the educational process
	Support and supervision	Creation of effective mechanisms for supporting participants in the educational process, in particular from among vulnerable groups, including psychological and social support, mentoring and counseling. Development of mechanisms for implementation and realization of permanent supervision and professional development of teachers in the field of inclusive education
	Cooperation with inclusive resource centers and public organizations	Establishment of partnership relations with external organizations will allow the exchange of experience, resources and best practices in the field of inclusive education

THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Inclusive higher education is key not only to achieving equity in education, it also plays a significant role in the broader spectrum of sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4, which aims for inclusive and equitable quality education,

set a global agenda that integrates inclusiveness into the core of education strategies. In Ukraine, amid challenges, including the ongoing war, the need for an inclusive educational environment becomes even more critical, serving as a catalyst for societal resilience and sustainable development.

The connection between inclusive higher education and sustainable development is deep and multifaceted. By developing an educational culture that values diversity and implements inclusive policies and practices, higher education institutions (HEIs) make a direct contribution to the achievement of several SDGs.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE CULTURE

An inclusive educational environment serves as a major catalyst for societal transformation by breaking down barriers, promoting gender equality, and empowering marginalized communities. By developing comprehensive curricula that raise awareness and embrace inclusive values, institutions of higher education contribute to the formation of a community that not only respects but actively supports the rights of all people. This engagement with inclusiveness directly supports the goal of reduced inequality (SDG 10), ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of education and opportunity.

This commitment to inclusiveness is vital to fostering social cohesion and peace, especially in conflict-affected regions like Ukraine. Educational institutions that promote inclusiveness can become microcosms of peace and understanding, teaching the next generation the values of tolerance and cooperation. Such efforts in education are aligned with SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, ensure access to justice for all and build effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

In addition, the integration of inclusive practices into the curriculum and structure of the educational community supports sustainable urbanization as envisioned by SDG 11. This goal not only seeks to make cities and settlements inclusive, safe, supportable and sustainable, but also emphasizes opportunities for all, including access to basic services, energy, housing, transport, etc. Inclusive universities and colleges contribute to this goal by fostering an environment where diverse ideas and cultures converge, fostering a broader cultural acceptance that can extend to urban infrastructure.

In addition, these efforts resonate with SDG 5, which emphasizes achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Inclusive educational practices that promote gender equality can challenge and change traditional stereotypes and barriers that women and girls face, both in and outside of academia.

By embedding these SDG-aligned values at the core of their mission, higher education institutions not only play a key role in advocating and realizing these global goals, but also in shaping a future where social sustainability is a reality for all. This increased focus on inclusiveness in education

is critical not only for training skilled professionals, but also for nurturing responsible global citizens who can make significant contributions to the world's sustainable development.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE POLICIES

Developing clear and accountable policies that ensure equal access for all should be a top priority for higher education institutions aiming to promote economic sustainability. By institutionalizing the principles of equality and non-discrimination, universities create a more inclusive and fair academic environment. This inclusiveness extends beyond the campus, encouraging a more diverse economic landscape where people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to contribute economically and thrive. Such strategies directly contribute to the achievement of SDG 8, which promotes sustainable, inclusive and stable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Adequate funding and facilities are crucial to making education accessible to all. Ensuring that educational resources, such as libraries, laboratories and classrooms, are well equipped and accessible to people with disabilities, for example, removes physical and socio-economic barriers to learning. Such access is not only a matter of equity, but also enhances the potential for all students to participate fully in the globalized world after graduation.

In addition, inclusive higher education policies play an important role in supporting SDG 1, which aims to eradicate poverty in all its forms. Education is a powerful tool in the fight against poverty, providing people with the skills and knowledge they need to improve their living conditions and economic opportunities. An inclusive education policy ensures that this tool is available to all, regardless of their economic status, thus increasing the potential for economic upliftment for wider sections of society.

These policies are also aligned with SDG 10, which aims to reduce inequality within and between countries. By fostering an inclusive learning environment, institutions of higher education help level the playing field by offering every student, regardless of socioeconomic status, a fair chance to succeed. This approach not only supports internal equality, but also contributes to a more balanced global economic landscape.

In addition, by promoting an inclusive labor market, higher education institutions contribute to the achievement of SDG 9, which focuses on building sustainable infrastructure, promoting inclusive and stable industrialization and innovation. Graduates of universities that base their policies on creating an inclusive educational environment are more likely to promote the values of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, stimulating more creative and innovative economic activity that is sustainable and broad-based.

By building inclusive policies into their operational structure, higher education institutions are laying a strong foundation for economic sustainability. These policies not only provide immediate benefits for students and staff, but also make a significant contribution to the wider economic

fabric of the societies, in which they operate, contributing to progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Inclusive practices in higher education that focus on environmental sustainability play an important role in shaping a new generation of environmentally conscious leaders. By integrating flexible educational programs that address environmental issues, universities enable students to develop innovative solutions to pressing environmental problems. This educational approach encourages the rational and sustainable use of natural resources, aligning it with SDG 12, which calls for responsible patterns of consumption and production. Through such curricula, students learn not only about the issues, but also about the best practices for minimizing environmental impact, leading to more sustainable lifestyles and business practices.

Collaboration plays a critical role in enhancing these efforts. By partnering with inclusive resource centers and community organizations, higher education institutions can engage in a meaningful exchange of best practices in sustainable development. These partnerships are essential to fostering a shared commitment to care for the environment and exemplify SDG 17, which promotes partnerships to achieve the goals. Such collaboration not only improves educational programs, but also creates a broader community of practitioners that transcends academic boundaries, integrating real-world programs and engaging the community in sustainability efforts.

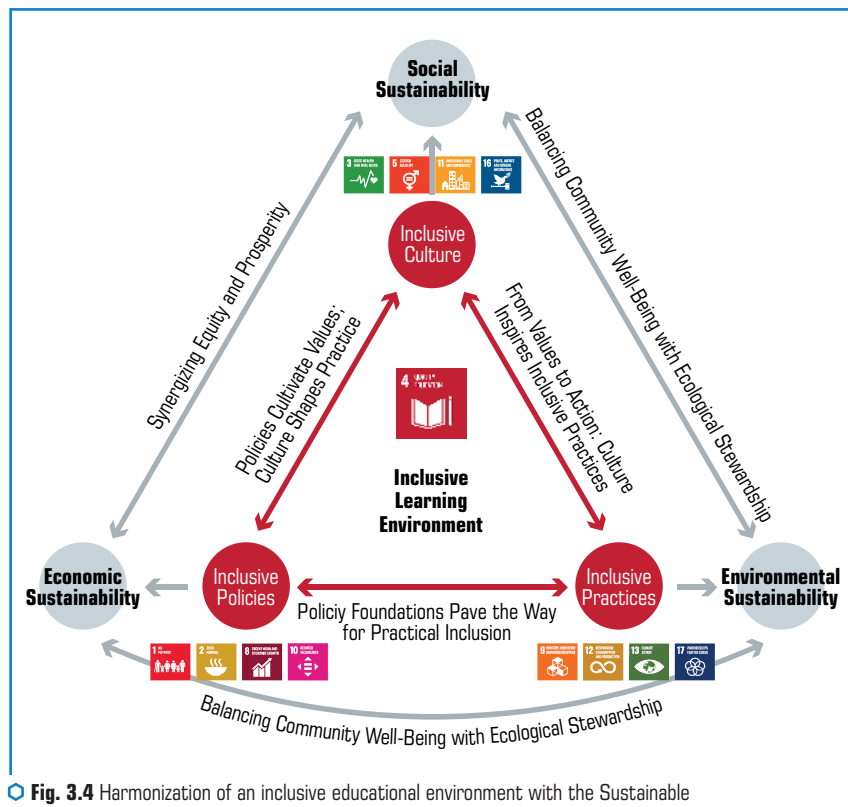
In addition, these inclusive educational practices contribute to the achievement of SDG 13, which aims to take urgent action to combat climate change and its consequences. By educating students about climate action and environmental protection, educational institutions are laying the groundwork for informed citizens who are ready to act on climate change through innovation and advocacy.

Additionally, the inclusive nature of these practices ensures that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to learn about and contribute to environmental solutions. This inclusiveness supports SDG 15, which aims to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable forest management, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss. Students who learn in diverse and inclusive conditions are more likely to appreciate and value biodiversity and the need for conservation efforts that are critical to achieving these environmental goals.

By implementing inclusive practices that incorporate environmental sustainability into their curricula, institutions of higher education are not only helping to meet the immediate educational needs of their students, but also addressing broader environmental issues. These efforts ensure that educational impact is deep, lasting, and extends far beyond campuses, contributing to a sustainable future through informed and engaged global citizens.

In summary, an inclusive educational environment not only supports the implementation of SDG 4, but also reinforces the broader sustainable development agenda by promoting social justice,

economic inclusion and environmental stewardship (**Fig. 3.4**). For Ukraine, investing in inclusive education is not just a necessity, but a strategic imperative that can contribute to national stability and sustainable development in the face of constant challenges. Higher education institutions must continue to evolve and adapt their practices, policies and cultural frameworks to create educational landscapes that are truly inclusive and capable of contributing to a sustainable future.



3.4 CONCLUSIONS

This article examines the complex relationship between the readiness of Ukrainian higher education institutions to create an inclusive educational environment and the perception of inclusiveness by students and employees of Ukrainian universities.

The general trend is a fairly positive assessment of the readiness of Ukrainian higher education institutions to build an inclusive educational environment, but with a certain discrepancy between the perception of students and employees. Students of higher education, as a rule, more positively assess the readiness of Ukrainian higher education institutions to build an inclusive educational environment, perhaps due to the direct feeling of positive changes in their educational environment. HEI employees rate this level lower. Distributions by target audience "Management staff of Higher Education Institutions", "Academic Staff of Higher Education Institutions", "Support Staff of Higher Education Institutions" do not differ significantly and indicate that among HEI employees of the dominant level of readiness to build an inclusive educational environment is an acceptable one. Higher education employees more critically assess the level of readiness for building an inclusive educational environment due to their role in planning and implementing inclusive strategies and policies, as well as due to greater awareness of systemic challenges.

In general, the obtained results indicate the existing challenges in Ukrainian higher education institutions regarding the readiness to build an inclusive educational environment. These challenges cover both structural and organizational aspects, as well as issues of inclusive culture. There is a need for further development and improvement of inclusive practices, especially in the areas of developing the values of diversity, creating a comfortable and accessible educational environment for all, as well as improving the quality of support, provided to students with different educational needs. The difference in perceptions between higher education learners and university staff highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the specific educational needs of each group, ensuring that policies and practices are appropriately tailored to meet the needs of all participants in the educational process.

To overcome the identified barriers and optimize the inclusiveness landscape, we recommend strategic measures, aimed at enriching inclusive culture, strengthening policy frameworks and improving practical actions in higher education. These include strengthening resource support and adapting educational programs to the heterogeneity of students' needs. The proposed improvements are key to creating a more robust, flexible and truly inclusive education system – one that not only aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, but also catalyzes sustainable development for society as a whole.

LIMITATIONS

The conducted study of the perception and assessment of the inclusiveness of the educational environment of higher education institutions in Ukraine has certain limitations. First, the conducted research is based on the self-report of the participants, that testifies to the subjectivity of the answers, therefore the readiness to build an inclusive educational environment can be determined not only by the formal policies of higher education institutions, but also by the personal beliefs and experiences of each respondent. A feature of the conducted research is the variety of respondents,

involved in the research from representatives of various vulnerable categories, while some categories are represented by a small number of respondents. At the same time, we note that such a situation is completely justified, since inclusion is about considering minorities as equal partners. In addition, during the study, the type of higher education institution and the specialty of the respondents were not additionally analyzed. These factors can influence the respondents' assessment of the level of readiness to build an inclusive educational environment. In addition, the obtained results are sensitive to the influence of external factors, such as political and social changes that affect the educational environment and policies of Ukrainian HEIs (in particular, the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine). It is also important to consider that the readiness to build an inclusive educational environment is a dynamic process, and the results reflect the state at the time of the study.

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