

Studying during the war

The issue of education during the war became very acute and important as the new school year approached. Considering the need to regulate the educational situation in the state, the authorities chose different strategies for the preparation of the educational process.

The situation in schools

After long discussions between parents, teachers and authorities regarding the form of education in Ukrainian schools, the Ministry of Education and Science proposed to start the school year according to the following principle: no child will be excluded from the educational process thanks to the parents' independent choice of their form of education. It was a kind of compromise between several opposing points of view. Thus, the school administration and children's parents received several options for providing/receiving educational services for students (with the possibility of switching between them):

- ✓ Offline form (with numerous requirements for educational institutions; the security situation in the region had to be taken into account, too; for example, schools in Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Mykolaiv are deprived of such an opportunity due to the high danger to the lives of pupils);
- ✓ Online form;
- ✓ Family form (home study);
- ✓ Mixed form (taking classes both online and offline);
- ✓ Externship.

So, on September 1, studying in Ukrainian schools started. According to the statement of the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, Serhiy Shkarlet, about 13 thousand schools in all regions of Ukraine were involved in the educational process, among which a significant number provide their services online - 45.3%, 29.2% were fully offline, and 25.5% offer a mixed form of education. Currently, about 3.9 million schoolchildren study in Ukrainian schools.

Strict security conditions are imposed on educational institutions that accept children within the school walls: the availability of a bomb shelter in the school building (only 68% of institutions currently have a shelter) or within a radius of 100 m from it; during an air alert, the educational process must be suspended, and all its participants must move to shelter; provision of shelter with high-quality Wi-fi for conducting lessons; bomb shelters should have a supply of food for at least two days, etc.

It should not be forgotten that more than 400,000 Ukrainian students are still studying abroad. For example, there are about 180,000 school-age children in neighboring Poland, some of them study in the new Polish school and simultaneously continue to study in Ukraine remotely.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine managed to offer a working option of free choice, allowing schools, children and parents autonomously solve the problems of organizing the educational process within the proposed limits. Indeed, the applied methods can be very controversial due to the difficult implementation of the construction of bomb shelters in some schools of the country, weak preparation for distance learning or the danger and stress of the educational process in an offline format, nevertheless, the most optimal measures were taken for the functioning of the educational system in Ukraine during a full-scale war.

The situation in universities

The legislation in Ukraine gives universities autonomy in making decisions regarding the start and terms of the 2022/2023 academic year, however, universities' administration must take into account recommendations from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science regarding the security situation in the region. A survey conducted in August by the Ministry of Education and Science showed that many students missed face-to-face education, but at the same time, a significant number of participants in the process of obtaining higher education expressed a desire to start this school year online.

Some institutions started studying in August, others - in September. Universities work according to three forms of education: offline, online and mixed - which directly depends on the risks to students' lives, as well as several other factors, for example, the major chosen by students. It is interesting that current differences in the forms of education are observed not only among universities but also among faculties of the same university. The requirements for offline studying are identical to those are for schools: arrangement of bomb shelters, availability of reliable air warning systems, etc.



Thus, the flexibility of higher education is quite problematic. Currently, many students are abroad, but full-time or mixed study at the university forces them to return to Ukraine because otherwise there is a risk of points deduction or taking a sabbatical year (with the possibility of losing funding from the scholarship).

The psychological burden the students bear reflects unfavorably on their condition and studies. Since the harsh news of the war has not disappeared, students also need to meet the deadlines, thus, starting to study only increased the feeling of anxiety and stress. Disruption of work due to air raid sirens while learning offline or ignoring the alarm during online classes interfere with the process of acquisition of professional skills and knowledge. A certain number of students literally drop out of the learning process, as they constantly change their place of residence in search of safety, and are forced to work to support themselves and their families while residing in other countries and time zones.

The system of higher education started a new academic year in the conditions of war, but it still has significant shortcomings and gaps, due to which the quality of education decreases or not all strata of Ukrainian students are able to access it in general.