One of the characteristics of education in the occupied territory of Donetsk is militarism. According to the educational ombudsman of the occupation administration, Daria Morozova, military-patriotic education of youth is a priority for the so-called "DPR" [1]. The Russian occupation authorities are deliberately working on education, shaping the new consciousness of the youth. Consequently, a component of Ukrainian policy for the restoration of education in temporarily occupied territories (TOT) is the reintegration of youth into the Ukrainian educational and cultural space.

Since 2015, applicants from TOT have had the opportunity to use the services of educational centers such as "Crimea-Ukraine" and "Donbas-Ukraine".

In 2019, there was an increased demand among applicants from TOT for admission to Ukrainian educational institutions [2]. The growth is observed to be twofold from 2016 to 2019: from 860 to 1600 applicants. Such demand is associated with an understanding of the value of quality education and the youth's desire to build their own future in an independent state.

The period of growth in the number of applicants from temporarily occupied territories (TOT) was initially interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which formally led to the closure of checkpoints by the occupation authorities. Later, it was further disrupted by the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukrainian territory, resulting in the transformation of former checkpoints into military positions. Currently, residents of TOT can only reach Ukrainian-controlled territory through Russia, making the movement of potential applicants almost impossible. The disconnect between the youth from TOT and the Ukrainian educational space was also fueled by the lack of clarity regarding the procedures for recognizing knowledge acquired in TOT and gaining admission to higher education institutions [3].

It is important to note that the quota for applicants from the occupied territories was never fully utilized by them. This may be a result of effective propaganda from the Russian Federation and insufficient informational campaigns from Ukraine.

In 2021, the analytical center Cedos presented a brief study titled "Students from temporarily occupied territories in Ukrainian higher education institutions: factors influencing admission and integration" [4]. According to the study, the following factors positively influence the readiness of youth from occupied territories to enroll in Ukrainian higher education institutions and facilitate effective integration:

- Living conditions and a lack of comfortable housing;
- Financial instability, the need for part-time work, reliance on state assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs);
- Quality of education;
- Involvement in volunteer and civic organizations.

Among the negative factors, the following are highlighted:

- Prejudiced attitudes toward individuals from temporarily occupied territories (TOT);
- Difficulty in crossing the border, travel routes to educational institutions, and returning home;
The need to undergo the procedure for recognizing academic results in the base secondary school (while Russia recognizes documents from the occupied territories without additional checks).

Valuable recommendations to the government, resulting from the study, include:
- Continuing the operation of Donbas-Ukraine and Crimea-Ukraine centers;
- Maintaining the possibility of admission through quotas to an expanded list of higher education institutions;
- Creating a unified resource for informing youth from TOT;
- Simplifying the procedure for recognizing educational and personal documents;
- Establishing youth infrastructure in front-line cities and cities with checkpoints, which can be relatively easily accessed from temporarily occupied cities, such as youth centers.

In 2020, a significant change occurred in the admission procedure for applicants from the occupied territories. They were allowed to choose any higher education institution (HEI) for preferential admission, not just those on the initial narrow list. However, this did not result in the expected increase in applicants, as by that time, the demarcation lines with the occupied territories had already been closed.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Reintegration reported a shift in focus on student reintegration in 2021-2023. To improve the use of funds allocated in the state budget for the reintegration of youth from the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, temporarily occupied territories of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and Sevastopol, stipends for students attending reintegration courses were increased to three subsistence minimums (for able-bodied individuals established as of January 1 of the calendar year per person) [5].

The orientation towards supporting youth is also evident in the "Strategy for the Integration of Internally Displaced Persons. Medium-term policy for the period until 2024" [6]. In addition to encouraging youth to study in Ukrainian HEIs, the Strategy draws attention to the recognition of academic results and study periods in temporarily occupied territories for obtaining documents on basic and full secondary education. Certain document recognition procedures have already been developed and implemented in practice.

In November 2022, the educational hub "Donbas" was opened in Kyiv, serving as a center for education for the region in a safe territory. Such hubs become educational centers for youth from the temporarily occupied territories, contributing to maintaining their connection with their homeland. As a result, it helps preserve the identity of the youth and their integration into the Ukrainian educational space.

References: