

UDC 35.08:316.4(477+4-6)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/tnv-pub.2025.2.10>

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DEI APPROACH IN THE UKRAINIAN PUBLIC SECTOR: EU EXPERIENCE AND PATHWAYS FOR ADAPTATION

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*The article explores theoretical and methodological approaches to the implementation of the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the sphere of public administration in Ukraine. The relevance of DEI is emphasized as a key component of the European model of good governance and an essential instrument for adapting Ukraine's public sector to EU standards. The meaning of the three core principles of the DEI approach – diversity, equity, and inclusion – is defined. The article outlines the sources of European Union law that enshrine the content of these principles and support their practical realization. Particular attention is given to the current level of DEI integration in Ukraine's public policy.*

*It is highlighted that in the context of post-war recovery and social transformation, the implementation of the DEI approach will not only expand citizens' access to public services but also enhance public trust in institutions, promote a transparent administrative culture, and strengthen social cohesion. The article describes the anticipated positive outcomes of DEI implementation, including improved efficiency in human resource management, the creation of inclusive environments for vulnerable groups, reduction of discriminatory practices, and increased innovation potential in the public service. At the same time, a number of challenges are identified: resistance from administrative elites, politicization of the topic, superficial implementation without real impact, and institutional or staffing deficiencies at various levels of governance.*

*Based on the conducted analysis, the article substantiates the feasibility of gradual, adaptive, and interdisciplinary integration of DEI strategies in Ukraine. It concludes that systematic application of the DEI approach may become a catalyst for high-quality modernization of public administration, especially in the context of national recovery, the humanitarian responsibilities of the state, and Ukraine's integration into the community of democratic nations.*

**Key words:** DEI approach, public administration, diversity, equity, inclusion.

### **Новікова М. М. Впровадження DEI-підходу в українському публічному секторі: досвід ЄС та шляхи адаптації**

*У статті досліджено теоретико-методологічні підходи до впровадження принципів різноманіття, рівності та інклюзії (DEI) у сфері публічного управління України. Наголошено на актуальності DEI як ключової складової європейської моделі належного врядування та важливого інструменту адаптації українського публічного сектору до стандартів ЄС. Визначено зміст трьох провідних принципів DEI-підходу – різноманіття, рівності та інклюзії. Охарактеризовано джерела Європейського Союзу, які закріплюють зміст цих принципів та сприяють їх реалізації. Акцентовано увагу на рівень впровадження принципів DEI у сучасну державну політику України.*

*Підкреслюється, що на тлі післявоєнного відновлення та соціальної трансформації суспільства впровадження DEI-підходу сприятиме не лише розширенню доступу громадян до публічних послуг, а й підвищенню рівня довіри до державних інституцій, формуванню прозорої управлінської культури та зміцненню соціальної згуртованості. У статті охарактеризовано очікувані позитивні наслідки запровадження DEI-підходу, серед яких – підвищення ефективності кадрових процесів, створення інклюзивного середовища для вразливих груп населення, зниження дискримінаційних практик та посилення інноваційного потенціалу публічної служби. Водночас виокремлено і низку викликів: спротив управлінських еліт, політизація теми, формалізація впровадження без реального впливу, а також інституційна й кадрова неспроможність на окремих рівнях влади. У результаті проведеного аналізу обґрунтовано доцільність поетапного, адаптивного та міждисциплінарного впровадження DEI-стратегій в Україні.*

*Зроблено висновок, що системне застосування DEI-підходу може стати каталізатором якісної модернізації публічного управління, особливо в умовах відбудови, гуманітарної відповідальності держави та інтеграції до спільноти демократичних країн.*

**Ключові слова:** DEI-підхід, публічне управління, різноманіття, рівність, інклюзія.

**Formulation of the problem.** In the current context of public administration system transformation in Ukraine, the implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles is gaining particular relevance. This approach constitutes an integral element of democratic governance grounded in human rights, non-discrimination, and respect for human dignity. Within the framework of European integration, the DEI approach functions not only as an ethical benchmark but also as part of the system of values enshrined in European Union law, particularly in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and a range of anti-discrimination directives.

For Ukraine, which aspires to EU membership, the incorporation of these principles into the functioning of public authorities is of strategic importance. The public sector plays a crucial role in building institutional capacity, ensuring equitable access to public services, and fostering an inclusive social environment. Despite notable progress, the implementation of DEI policies in Ukraine remains fragmented, marked by formalistic approaches and the absence of a coherent legal and methodological framework. Consequently, this issue requires in-depth scholarly analysis and the development of effective strategies and recommendations for integrating the DEI approach into the national public administration system.

**Analysis of research and publications.** An examination of the academic discourse on the implementation of the DEI approach in the public sector reveals a significant disparity between its development in international and Ukrainian contexts. Foreign scholars such as H. Alibašić, S. Bishu, M. Hernandez, S. McCandless, A. Nwoga, E. Nyarko, E. Paredes Eraso, and S. Yates have actively explored various aspects of DEI integration in public administration. Their research focuses on the legal frameworks governing the application of EU anti-discrimination directives and their adaptation within national administrations, organizational mechanisms and leadership models that support diversity and inclusion, and the development of indicators and monitoring systems to assess the effectiveness of DEI initiatives in the public sector.

In Ukraine, more attention is paid to gender and intercultural aspects of governance (O. Herasymova), as well as to issues of inclusion in the educational and social spheres as integral components of the broader equality policy (L. Bondarenko, S. Shchehel, I. Mantsurov). These studies and the conclusions drawn from them contribute to the formation of theoretical foundations and practical tools for implementing DEI in the public sector. However, only a limited number of them address all three key components of the DEI approach – diversity, equity, and inclusion – in a comprehensive manner and fail to ensure a systematic approach to their integration into administrative practice.

**The purpose** of this article is to analyze the European experience of implementing the DEI approach in the public sector and to identify the opportunities and mechanisms for adapting this experience to the Ukrainian context.

**Presentation of the main research material.** The DEI approach – diversity, equity, inclusion – originated in the United States in the mid-20th century as a response to the need to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens. Its foundations are closely tied to civil rights legislation, particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national

origin. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, which obligated federal contractors to comply with the principles of equal employment and to implement affirmative action programs. In the 1980s, the concept of diversity gained popularity in the corporate sector, as it became evident that diverse teams contribute to innovation and organizational effectiveness. Later, in the 2000s, the DEI approach became an integral part of the strategies of numerous companies and public institutions aimed at creating an inclusive work environment for all employees, and also laid the foundation for public democracy strategies in the public sector [1, p. 141].

However, with Donald Trump's return to the presidency of the United States in 2025, a radical shift occurred in federal policy concerning DEI. On January 20, 2025, he signed Executive Order 14151, which ordered the termination of all government programs related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, as well as the dismissal of related staff. Additionally, Executive Order 11246 – originally issued in 1965 to ensure equal employment opportunities for federal contractors – was repealed. These actions led to mass layoffs of DEI-related personnel and the suspension of corresponding programs across federal institutions. It is worth noting the polarized reaction within American society, which has resulted in the suspension or resistance to federal implementation at the state level in several cases [2]. At the same time, many large American corporations – including Walmart, Meta, Amazon, McDonald's, Ford, Lowe's, Harley-Davidson, John Deere, Tractor Supply, and PBS – began to scale back or entirely discontinue their DEI programs and paused participation in the Corporate Equality Index starting in late 2024.

In contrast, the European Union continues to actively promote and institutionalize DEI principles within the public service. A vivid example is the 2025 edition of the "European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards," which recognized municipalities that have made significant progress in building inclusive and diverse environments for their citizens. This initiative is part of the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan and the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025. In 2025, the awards were granted in two primary categories – for local authorities serving populations of fewer and more than 50,000 residents – and included a special prize for achievements in the area of "inclusive housing" [3].

For Ukraine, which seeks deeper integration with the European Union, the adoption of DEI principles in public administration holds not only a European dimension but also practical significance for reinforcing social cohesion, democratic governance, and the elimination of discriminatory practices during the post-war recovery period. In this context, a more detailed examination of the content and meaning of the three DEI principles – diversity, equity, and inclusion – as key components of contemporary public policy is warranted.

The principle of diversity in the context of public administration encompasses the recognition and respect for social, cultural, ethnic, gender, age, religious, physical, and other differences among employees, citizens, and stakeholders. It involves treating each individual's unique experience as a resource that contributes to decision-making, enhances management efficiency, and improves the quality of public service delivery. According to M. Sabharwal and S. Bishu, organizations that embrace diversity tend to demonstrate greater innovation capacity, adaptability, and public trust [4].

As noted by Z. Arsel and D. Crockett, equity implies fair treatment of individuals in both opportunities and outcomes [5, p. 920]. In public administration, this principle extends beyond the provision of formal equal opportunities to include the creation of enabling conditions that allow all participants in public life to fully exercise their rights and potential on the basis of fairness. This includes eliminating barriers that hinder

access to resources, participation in decision-making processes, or career advancement.

In the Ukrainian academic discourse, the principle of inclusion is defined as the creation of equal opportunities for access to the protection of human rights and freedoms, economic development, education, healthcare, and good governance for all citizens [6; 7]. Thus, inclusion is understood as the active creation of an environment in which all members of society or an organization feel valued, engaged, and empowered. Inclusion goes beyond merely inviting participation; it ensures the real capacity to influence processes, shape decisions, and co-create policies. E. Santis and E. Paredes Eraso emphasize that inclusion is a key component of sustainable institutional development and effective public administration [4]. Therefore, the DEI concept is inherently interconnected: diversity creates the foundation for new ideas and perspectives, equity ensures fair access to opportunities, and inclusion guarantees meaningful participation and mutual respect within an organization or society. Applying the DEI approach in the public sector is becoming a necessary condition for building an innovative, socially responsive, and legitimate system of public governance.

In the European Union, the principles underlying the DEI approach are enshrined in a range of legal instruments that provide the normative basis for implementing these values in public administration and labor relations. Chief among them is the revised European Social Charter (1996) [8], which obliges the member states to ensure the effective realization of human rights, including the right to equal treatment, non-discrimination, access to employment, protection of vulnerable groups, and the integration of persons with disabilities. Particular attention in the document is given to creating conditions for social equity and equal access to resources, which constitutes a fundamental element of the principle of equity.

Other important instruments include Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin [9]; Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation [10]; and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union [11], which confers constitutional status on the principles of dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizenship, and justice within the EU legal order. Collectively, these instruments establish a conceptual and legal foundation for the implementation of the DEI approach, which is reflected in the national policies of EU member states.

The role of the DEI approach (diversity, equity, inclusion) in Ukraine's public sector is gaining increasing importance in the context of the country's European integration aspirations and post-war recovery. Although the systematic implementation of DEI principles has not yet become a widespread practice, several initiatives indicate a gradual movement in this direction. Over the past five years, Ukraine has adopted a number of strategic documents, including the National Human Rights Strategy (2021), the Human Development Strategy (2021), the National Strategy for Creating a Barrier-Free Space in Ukraine until 2030 (2021), and the State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030 (2022) [12]. Based on these strategies, relevant amendments have been made to national legislation, and a set of methodological recommendations has been developed for integrating elements of these strategies into the work of central and local public authorities.

Therefore, projecting the further gradual implementation of the DEI approach in Ukrainian public administration, one can anticipate a range of interconnected positive and negative outcomes. First, DEI can enhance public trust in state institutions by ensuring equal treatment for all citizens regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics,

while also supporting European integration through the harmonization of national legislation with EU standards. Second, engaging diverse groups in decision-making and fostering inclusive environments enhances the efficiency of the public service and facilitates a more balanced response to the needs of veterans, internally displaced persons, minorities, and persons with disabilities during the country's recovery process. Additionally, DEI contributes to reducing discriminatory risks in public employment by ensuring the objectivity of competitive selection processes and implementing anti-corruption mechanisms.

At the same time, potential risks must not be overlooked: part of the administrative elite may resist DEI as a response to «Western» initiatives, and the topic itself may become politicized under the influence of populist or anti-European forces. Further challenges – such as a lack of trained professionals, insufficient methodological resources, a superficial «box-ticking» approach without proper monitoring or incentives, and additional institutional burden in conditions of limited capacity – highlight the need for a phased and adaptive implementation of DEI strategies in public governance.

**Conclusions.** Based on the preceding analysis, it can be concluded that the implementation of the DEI approach in Ukraine's public sector is both justified and strategically important for several reasons. First, the country's European integration strategy requires the harmonization of national legislation in the areas of anti-discrimination and inclusion. Second, the introduction of the DEI approach will foster greater trust in government institutions, increase innovation potential, and strengthen social cohesion during the post-war recovery period. Third, the risks of formalistic implementation and bureaucratic resistance can be mitigated through the gradual rollout of pilot projects followed by their broader scaling. Finally, the integration of existing initiatives in the areas of gender equality, digital accessibility, and social inclusion into a unified DEI framework will help standardize approaches, centralize performance indicators, and ensure a systemic character of reform.

Thus, the DEI approach emerges as a necessary tool for strengthening institutional capacity, fulfilling national and European commitments, and shaping a transparent, innovative, and socially responsive model of governance in Ukraine.

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