

Ukraine launches major social protection transformation programme to support over one million people

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Ukraine is set to undertake one of the most significant reforms of its social protection system since independence following approval of a major programme designed to modernise welfare delivery, improve labour market participation and strengthen support for vulnerable citizens.

The new Social Protection Project for Inclusion, Resilience, Innovation and Transformation (SPIRIT) will support more than one million Ukrainians while helping the government redesign key elements of its social assistance framework to align with European standards and long-term recovery objectives.

The initiative comes as Ukraine continues to manage the social and economic impacts of war, with many households facing ongoing financial hardship, displacement and reduced access to employment opportunities.

A transformation programme, not simply a funding package

While the programme includes substantial financial support for low-income families, people with disabilities, older citizens and caregivers, its broader significance lies in the structural reforms it seeks to deliver.

Rather than maintaining multiple fragmented assistance schemes, the project will support the creation of a more integrated social protection system that links financial support directly with employment services and wider social assistance.

For project professionals, SPIRIT represents a large-scale public sector transformation programme involving policy reform, organisational change, digital integration, service redesign and stakeholder management across multiple levels of government.

Creating a single access point for support

One of the programme's flagship reforms is the creation of a Basic Social Assistance system that consolidates numerous benefit programmes into a single framework.

The objective is to create a one-stop-shop model through which vulnerable individuals can access income support, employment services and social assistance through an integrated case management system.

This approach aims to improve efficiency, reduce administrative complexity and help beneficiaries move more effectively towards employment and economic independence where possible.

The model reflects broader international trends in social policy, where governments are increasingly seeking to integrate welfare support with workforce participation and long-term inclusion strategies.

Reforming disability support

A second major reform focuses on disability services.

The programme will help Ukraine transition away from a traditional medical certification model towards a person-centred system that assesses individual capabilities and support requirements.

The new framework will incorporate rehabilitation services, assistive technologies, personalised support plans and employment assistance, aligning more closely with European Union standards and modern disability inclusion practices.

For project leaders involved in public sector reform, the initiative demonstrates the growing emphasis on outcome-focused service design rather than purely administrative delivery models.

Changing how social services are funded

The project will also transform social service financing.

Under the proposed model, funding will increasingly follow individual needs, allowing citizens to access services from a broader mix of community organisations, non-profit providers and private sector organisations.

This shift is designed to encourage greater flexibility, improve service quality and expand access to support across different regions of the country.

Successfully implementing such a change will require significant programme management capability, including governance structures, provider engagement, performance monitoring and change management at both national and local levels.

Supporting Ukraine's long-term recovery

Beyond immediate social support, SPIRIT forms part of Ukraine's broader recovery and European integration agenda.

Many of the reforms directly support requirements linked to Ukraine's EU accession process, particularly in areas such as labour market inclusion, disability rights and social policy modernisation.

The programme therefore serves a dual purpose: addressing urgent social needs while simultaneously building institutions capable of supporting long-term economic and social development.

Lessons in transformation delivery

For project professionals, SPIRIT highlights the scale and complexity involved in delivering transformational public sector programmes.

Success will depend not only on funding but on effective stakeholder engagement, policy coordination, institutional capacity building and sustained governance throughout implementation.

As governments worldwide grapple with ageing populations, labour shortages and rising social service demands, Ukraine's programme provides a notable example of how large-scale reform initiatives can combine immediate support with longer-term structural transformation.

Ultimately, SPIRIT is not simply about distributing benefits. It is about redesigning how support is delivered, connecting people more effectively to employment and services, and building a more resilient social protection system capable of supporting Ukraine's recovery and future development.