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Library and Information Services for National Minorities and Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine in the Context of Contemporary Challenges

The **objective** of the proposed study is to highlight the issue of equal access to library and information services for national minorities and indigenous peoples of Ukraine in the context of countering the threats faced by the world in the first quarter of the 21st century. **Methods.** Methodologically, the article is based on the correlation of the concepts of power and culture, which in our case are represented by libraries and ethnic communities, respectively. **Results.** Based on the analysis of reporting materials and the content of the websites of Ukrainian library institutions, a number of successful approaches to the integration of national minorities and indigenous peoples into the library space were identified. However, in the vast majority of cases, there is a tendency towards declarativity and symptomatism in the implementation of IFLA guidelines aimed at achieving equality in the library and information sphere. The final part of the article and **conclusions** propose the development and implementation of a roadmap aimed at reducing the striking imbalance in access to library services for national minorities and indigenous peoples.

Keywords: library; national minorities; indigenous peoples; library and information services; library services

Introduction

Like most countries in the world, Ukraine is a multiethnic state, and representatives of national minorities and indigenous peoples are granted the same rights as the titular nation. Among these is the right to unimpeded access to information in their mother tongue. For more than 130 ethnic communities in Ukraine (Derzhavnyy komitet statystyky Ukrayiny, 2001), Ukrainian is not their mother tongue, which raises a completely logical question: should libraries at all levels, as key centres of information, provide visitors with content and services in a language other than the official language?

For library institutions in any European country, the answer to this question is obvious – they should, and they do. The Ukrainian library system declares a policy of unrestricted access to library services for national minorities and indigenous peoples – but is this the case in practice? Since 2014, Ukraine has faced a number of external threats that have directly affected the quality of library services. The annexation of Crimea and Russia's hybrid aggression in eastern Ukraine triggered waves of migration among national communities from areas of compact settlement. In particular, unique ethnic landscapes of Donechchyna and Luhanshchyna were lost, and such groups as the Karaites and Meskhetian Turks have almost disappeared from the ethnodemographic map of Ukraine. The COVID-19 pandemic forced Ukrainian libraries to accelerate digitalization and shift services to the cloud environment. Finally, the full-scale invasion by Russian forces not only caused another migration crisis but also endangered the very existence of the Ukrainian library system – libraries even in central and western regions began to suffer from missile and bomb attacks. Back in the late 1990s, New Zealand librarian J. H. Mohi

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wrote that when an aggressor seeks to destroy a nation and its culture, libraries become direct targets (Fuentes-Romero, 2004).

It is possible to speak of a surge of interest in the issue of library and information services for national minorities and indigenous peoples in relation to the period from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. It was associated with the discussion and implementation of the recommendations of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) (Josey, 1985). A number of publications appeared, both general in nature (Fuentes-Romero, 2004) and devoted to specific countries (Wadhwa, 2024; Agustín-Lacruz & Saurin-Parra, 2020). Special attention should be given to studies that focused on library and information services for migrants (Berger, 2002). This issue became particularly acute in countries that had not previously been characterized by significant ethnic diversity and were unprepared for a growing share of minorities in their overall populations.

In Ukraine, the development of this issue began only in the early 2000s, driven by the acceleration of efforts to bring the national library system in line with global standards. Ukrainian library theorists and practitioners turned their attention to studying the experiences of selected libraries and regions with a significant share of minority populations (Radchenko, 2005; Bilanych, 2009; Botushans'ka, 2009; Vladova, 2009; Kudlach, 2011; Sydorenko, 2014), as well as to referencing European practices that could be useful in the Ukrainian context (Todortsev-Khlacha, 2016; Shemaieva, 2019). However, after 2022, there has been a sharp decline in interest in the topic of ensuring equal access to library services for Ukraine's ethnic communities.

Being in a state of constant redistribution of budget funds due to the full-scale war, Ukraine is unable to fully implement all IFLA guidelines on the provision of library services to national minorities and indigenous peoples. It should be noted, however, that these guidelines had not been fully implemented even by 2014.

The titular nation (or ethnic majority) will always dominate in terms of access to information resources, but the task of library staff is to minimise the level of discomfort experienced by ethnic minorities regarding language equality in the library environment (Wadhwa, 2024).

Thus, the purpose of this publication is to assess the current situation in the field of library and information services for ethnic communities in Ukraine. In addition, we propose a “roadmap” project for the Ukrainian library system on the implementation of best international practices for operating library institutions in a linguistically diverse environment.

Methods

On a fundamental level, this article focuses on establishing the interconnections between such theoretical concepts as “library” and “national minorities,” “indigenous peoples.” At the same time, we do not aim to revise already established interpretations of these categories, despite the existing space for debate. We merely propose viewing libraries and ethnic communities through the lens of the intersection of broader categories of power and culture.

The beginning of the 21st century is marked by the rapid development of multiculturalism as a consequence of continuous migration. Migration processes caused by wars, famine, economic crises, and epidemics have led to the transformation of the concept of “national culture”. It is increasingly perceived as the sum of the diverse cultures of the ethnic groups, which form the population of the state. The representation of national minority cultures is extremely important, because in today's globalised world, we are all cultural minorities

fighting for our place on the global cultural arena (Fuentes-Romero, 2004; Agustín-Lacruz & Saurin-Parra, 2020).

Thus, by emphasizing the connection between the concepts of power (libraries) and culture (nations and national minorities, indigenous peoples), we legitimize the placement of the issue of library and information services for national minorities and indigenous peoples within the conceptual intersection of disciplines such as philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, and others.

Results and Discussion

According to the 2001 national census, 8 million people in Ukraine belonged to national minorities and indigenous peoples (Derzhavna sluzhba Ukrayiny z etnopolityky ta svobody sovisti, 2025). In the statistics, they are represented by 54 categories, the most numerous among them being Belarusians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Jews, Moldovans, Poles, Russians, Romanians, Hungarians, and others. The 2001 census remains the most recent to date. In recent years, Ukraine's population has significantly declined. The reasons for this vary, but the main factor is the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, which has lasted for more than ten years.

One of the indicators of ensuring the realization of cultural, linguistic, and educational rights of persons belonging to national minorities and indigenous peoples of Ukraine is the formation of library collections with copies published in the languages of these communities, as well as the organization of lectures, training sessions, interactive events, and similar activities based at library institutions.

Let us consider the quantitative indicators of the public library collections through the lens of the availability of copies in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples, using the publicly accessible data available on the "Bibliotchnomu fakhivtsiu" website, which is maintained by the Scientific and Methodical Department of the Yaroslav Mudryi National Library of Ukraine. It should be noted that the state of the issue under consideration can be traced for the years 2020, 2023 and 2024 (Figures 1, 2, 3) based on consolidated reports according to Form No. 6-NK (Bibliotchnomu fakhivtsiu, 2020, 2023, 2024). For other years, the reports contain information on the total number of copies and copies in Ukrainian, but there is no specific information on the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples.

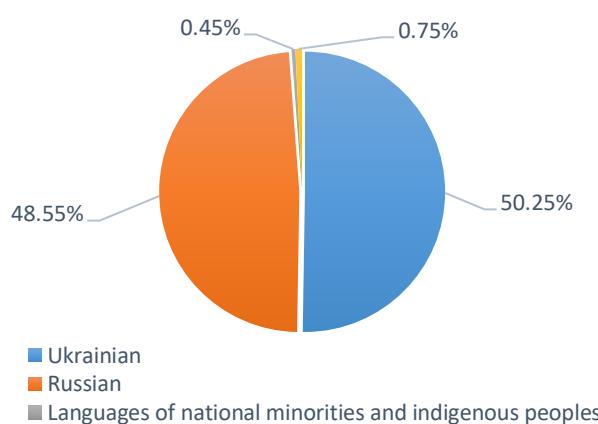


Fig. 1. Number of documents in the Ukrainian library collection (public libraries) by language (%), 2020.

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At the end of 2020, only 0.45% of copies were in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples. Of these: Polish – 0.06%, Moldovan – 0.12%, German – 0.02%, Romanian – 0.04%, Hungarian – 0.16%, Crimean Tatar, Bulgarian, Czech, Greek, Hebrew, Gagauz, Turkish – each less than 0.01%, and in total – 0.02%, others – 0.03%, English, Slovenian – 0%. It should be noted that Russian was not listed as a minority language in the report table.

A different approach to reflecting copies of public library collections in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples is observed in the reports for 2023 and 2024. Russian is not separated from other languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples, but is presented in alphabetical order. Therefore, in Figure 2, the percentage of copies in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples has increased significantly.

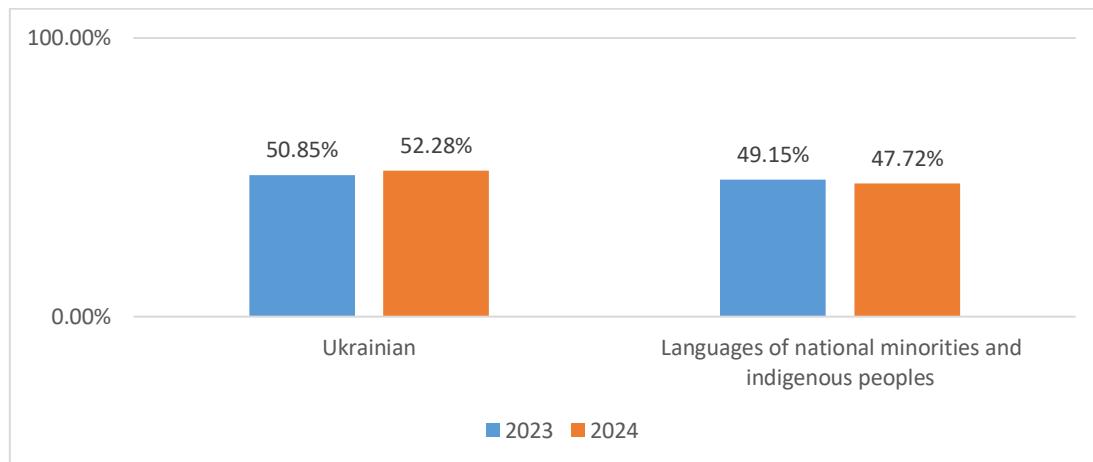


Fig. 2. Number of documents in the Ukrainian library collection (public libraries) by language (%), 2023 and 2024.

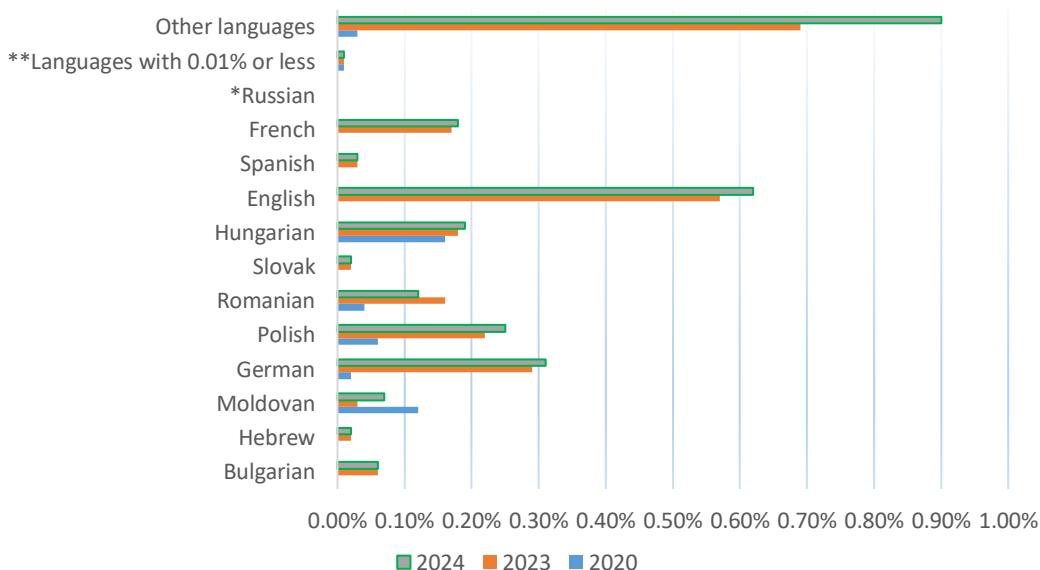


Fig. 3. Number of documents in the Ukrainian library collection (public libraries) in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples (%), 2020, 2023 and 2024.

*Russian is not included in the chart so as not to lose the overall visualisation, as there are more copies in this language: 2020 – 48.55%, 2023 – 46.68%, 2024 – 44.92%.

**Belarusian, Gagauz, Greek, Crimean Tatar, Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, Czech.

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In general, we see positive dynamics. However, for certain languages, in particular Crimean Tatar and Modern Greek, the situation requires enhanced measures on the part of the state. Representatives of these national minorities and indigenous peoples have left their territory of residence, so they face the problem of simultaneously integrating into new communities and preserving their identity. Another vital issue is the integration of the Roma community into Ukrainian society, and engaging them in reading through book exhibitions and presentations of new publications could be an effective way to do this.

Library and information services are a set of services in which user services play a special role, namely the organisation and conduct of educational, scientific, cultural and informational events. Thematic meetings, exhibitions, round tables, celebrations and commemorations of events related to national minorities and indigenous peoples are a format that is actively used in libraries. The calendar of holidays and memorable dates of library institutions, on the occasion of which events are organised and which are directly related to the indigenous peoples of Ukraine, includes the following Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Crimean Tatar Genocide and Day of Struggle for the Rights of the Crimean Tatar People (18 May) the Day of the Crimean Tatar Flag (26 June, an unofficial holiday).

On May 21st this year, for the first time, Ukraine celebrated the Day of Interethnic Harmony and Cultural Diversity, which was established with the aim of strengthening the unity and harmony of the people of Ukraine, affirming Ukrainian national and civic identity, promoting the free development of cultural diversity among indigenous peoples and national minorities (communities) of Ukraine, as well as showing respect for their contribution to the defence of Ukraine's state sovereignty and independence and to the armed struggle against the aggressor state (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024). The authors analysed the information presented on the websites of regional universal scientific libraries (hereinafter referred to as RUSL) regarding the new holiday. Not all RUSLs highlighted the significance of this Day for Ukrainian society and its part, namely national minorities (communities)/indigenous peoples. However, we consider the gradual acceptance of the new date to be a completely natural phenomenon that should not be criticised.

Nevertheless, informational work was carried out in preparation for the Day of Interethnic Harmony and Cultural Diversity: the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Universal Scientific Library named after Cyril and Methodius, the first teachers of the Slavs, organised a book and illustration exhibition at the Karol Wojtyła Polish Cultural Centre (Dnipropetrov's'ka oblasna universal'na naukova biblioteka im. Pervouchyteliv slov"yans'kykh Kyryla i Mefodiya, 2025); The Mykolaiv Regional Universal Scientific Library offered visitors the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the publication "Ukraine – A Constellation of Cultures" (Kyiv: Novyi Druk, 2019) from its own collection (Mykolaivs'ka oblasna universal'na naukova biblioteka, 2025); The Vinnytsia Regional Universal Scientific Library named after Valentyn Otamanovskyi prepared a book and illustration exhibition entitled "Together on One Land" (Vinnytska oblasna universalna naukova biblioteka imeni Valentyna Otamanovskoho, 2025); The Rivne Regional Universal Scientific Library has launched a thematic book exhibition entitled "The Culture of National Minorities – An Integral Part of Ukrainian Culture" (Rivnens'ka oblasna universal'na naukova biblioteka, 2025); The Poltava Regional Universal Scientific Library named after I. P. Kotliarevsky opened an exhibition of children's drawings entitled "Cultural Unity Through the Eyes of Children" (Poltavska Oblasna Universalna Naukova biblioteka imeni I. P. Kotliarevskoho, 2025); The Cherkasy Regional Universal Scientific Library named after Taras Shevchenko prepared a review of publications entitled "Books Unite Nations" (Cherkas'ka OUNB imeni Tarasa Shevchenka, 2025); The Chernivtsi Regional Universal Scientific Library named after M. Ivasyuk hosted cultural dialogues entitled

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“Bukovina – Luhanshchyna: Patterns, Models, Designs...” (Chernivets'ka oblasna universal'na naukova biblioteka im. M. Ivasyuka, 2025); Ternopil Regional Universal Scientific Library opened a book exhibition entitled “Dialogue of Cultures: Preserving Identity” and held an event entitled “More Than Neighbours” as part of the Day of Hungarian Culture in Ternopil (Ternopil's'ka oblasna universal'na naukova biblioteka, 2025).

As part of our research, we propose a roadmap aimed at levelling the imbalance in access to library services for national minorities and indigenous peoples. Among the possible ways to overcome inequality in access to information, we highlight the following:

1. Focus on electronic libraries and digital publications. Under conditions of severe underfunding of the library sector, the creation of an extensive network of electronic digital libraries based on the model of the Polish “Federacja Bibliotek Cyfrowych” (FBC) could be a temporary solution to the problem of “information drought” for ethnic communities in Ukraine. First and foremost, publications and research in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples, devoted to the history and culture of Ukraine's national communities, should be digitised. An urgent technical problem that needs to be solved is the task of updating language packs for software that recognises texts in minority languages.

2. A logical continuation of the previous initiative is to involve libraries in publishing projects. Libraries as digital publishers are a viable model for supporting the dissemination of niche literature with limited demand, i.e. publications in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples.

3. Launching the “Mobile Library” project for areas with compact settlements of national communities. Similar projects exist in Ukraine in the form of individual social support initiatives for internally displaced persons, but they do not concern library services. Nevertheless, scaling up the mobile library project is particularly important in a situation where ethnic communities live mainly in rural areas, where there is no question of updating library collections with literature in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples.

4. To provide all library institutions with funds in the languages of ethnic communities of Ukraine, it is necessary to create a national resource centre where all printed and digital materials aimed at ethnic communities would be concentrated. Remote libraries could obtain literature from such resource centres through an interlibrary loan service, which is currently in decline in Ukraine. In general, the percentage of literature and library resources in the languages of national minorities and indigenous peoples should be relevant to the proportion of the minority population in a particular region. This practice has long been established in Denmark, for example.

5. Initiate the creation of the position of “consultant on national minorities and indigenous peoples” in regional public libraries, with the possibility of scaling up their activities through a system of mobile libraries.

Conclusions

Currently, we cannot say that Ukraine has created all the conditions necessary for equal access to library services for national minorities and indigenous peoples. However, the problem lies not only in the realm of state responsibility, but also in the responsibility of the ethnic communities themselves. A striking example in this regard is the Roma community, which is characterised by a marked distancing from education, a trend that can be observed not only in Ukraine, but throughout Europe.

The problem is complicated not so much by the significant proportion of the minority population as by its ethnic heterogeneity. The presence of more than 130 national minorities and indigenous peoples on the imaginary ethno-demographic map of Ukraine automatically poses a

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challenge for the Ukrainian library system to create catalogues in minority languages and employ staff who represents the ethnic communities of Ukraine. This, in turn, is associated with the more fundamental problem of raising the prestige of the librarian profession in the post-Soviet space.

The success of individual regional library institutions in solving the problem of equal access for minorities to library and information services across the country has yielded only symptomatic results that do not fundamentally change the situation as a whole. The launch of a process of systematic monitoring of variable indicators related to library and information services for national minorities and indigenous peoples will make it possible to adjust the roadmap proposed in this article in line with Ukrainian realities and to implement IFLA standards more effectively, without limiting the usual declarative approach.

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Бібліотечно-інформаційне обслуговування національних меншин та корінних народів України в умовах викликів сучасності

Метою запропонованого дослідження є висвітлення проблеми рівного доступу національних меншин та корінних народів України до бібліотечно-інформаційних послуг у контексті протидії загрозам, з якими стикається світ у першій чверті ХХІ століття. **Методика.** Методологічно стаття базується на співвідношенні концептів влади та культури, що в нашому випадку репрезентовані бібліотеками та етнічними громадами відповідно. **Результати.** На основі аналізу звітних матеріалів та контенту вебсайтів українських бібліотечних установ України було виявлено низку вдалих підходів щодо інтеграції національних меншин та корінних народів до бібліотечного простору. Однак у переважній більшості випадків спостерігається тенденція до декларативності та симптоматичності у впровадженні рекомендацій IFLA, спрямованих на досягнення рівності в бібліотечно-інформаційній сфері. У підсумковій частині статті та **висновках** пропонується розробка та впровадження дорожньої карти, спрямованої на зменшення разючого дисбалансу в доступі до бібліотечних послуг для національних меншин та корінних народів.

Ключові слова: бібліотека; національні меншини; корінні народи; бібліотечно-інформаційне обслуговування; бібліотечні послуги

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