

## РЕЦЕНЗІЇ / REVIEWS

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**POST-WAR SOCIAL POLICY THROUGH THE PRISM OF CHILD ORPHANAGE IN THE UKRAINIAN SSR (a peer-review of the publication: Bezlyudna, I. Orphans of the Postwar Ukrainian SSR: Everyday Life, Challenges, and Adaptation (the Second Half of the 1940s – First Half of the 1950s). Kyiv: Institute of History of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2025. 232 pp., ill.)**

**ПОВОЄННА СОЦІАЛЬНА ПОЛІТИКА КРІЗЬ ПРИЗМУ ДИТЯЧОГО СИРІТСТВА В УРСР (рецензія на видання: Безлюдна І. Діти-сироти повоєнної УРСР: повсякденність, виклики та адаптація (друга половина 1940-х – перша половина 1950-х рр.). Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, 2025. 232 с., іл.)**

Diverse domestic and foreign scholars focused on the issues of post-war childhood and orphanhood in Ukraine. Certain aspects of the social situation of children in the early

post-war years, in particular the phenomena of orphanhood and homelessness, everyday life in the Ukrainian villages, and the social challenges of the 1940s and 1950s, have been highlighted in the studies by O. V. Sheremeta, V. P. Shvydkyi, and I. A. Yakimenko (Sheremeta, 1998; Shvydkyi, 2007; Yakimenko, 2012). The socio-economic conditions of life in post-war Ukraine and their impact on the environment for children have been analysed in comprehensive studies by I. M. Romanyuk, L. V. Kovpak, and G. M. Holysh (Romanyuk, 2005; Kovpak, 2003; Holysh, 2005), while the functioning of special children's institutions in the Ukrainian SSR in 1943 – 1950 has been studied by L. G. Lysytsia (Lysytsia, 2021). A foreign perspective on the transformation of the institutional child care system has been covered in the works published by B. Lough and P. Panos (Lough, & Panos, 2003).

At the same time, despite existing scientific research, the everyday life of orphaned children in post-war Ukraine, their adaptation strategies, social practices, and survival mechanisms in the second half of the 1940s and first half of the 1950s have remained fragmentarily covered for a long time. In this regard, the monograph "Orphans of the Postwar Ukrainian SSR: Everyday Life, Challenges, and Adaptation (the second half of the 1940s – first half of the 1950s)" is a pertinent and useful study that naturally enhances the contemporary historiographical discourse, by fusing everyday life studies with an analysis of social vulnerability and the experiences of "silent" population groups. Since it clearly illustrates the discrepancy between the official rhetoric of state care and the actual practices of orphaned children's survival in the post-war era, there is a decidedly demythologising quality in this monograph. Given the current humanitarian issues brought on by war and the rising number of children, who have lost their parents, its applicability is increased, providing the study both historical and socially significant dimension.

The broad source base is considered to be an indisputable advantage of the study. The materials from the Central and Regional Archives, regulatory and legal documents of the Soviet authorities, statistical reports, memoirs of contemporaries, as well as the achievements of domestic and foreign historiography were incorporated into the above-mentioned monograph. An important advantage is the introduction into scientific circulation of a significant array of little-known archival documents, which significantly improves our understanding of the daily lives of orphaned children. Due to the comprehensive approach, it was possible to revive the real living conditions of orphaned children and also to reflect critically on the discrepancies between the official rhetoric of the "state care" and the everyday practice of the care system.

The application of the tools of Everyday life history and social history is considered to be a vital methodological achievement of the study. Based on the analysis of the daily life, nutrition, disciplinary practices, educational process, and psychological adaptation of orphans, the author managed to demonstrate convincingly the complexity and contradictions of the processes of socialization of children in post-war society.

The structure of the monograph is logical, well thought out, and corresponds to the stated subject issue. The division into three chapters enables a comprehensive coverage of various aspects of the lives of orphaned children – from life on the streets to the institutional and semi-institutional forms of care and integration into the "adult" world.

The causes of mass child homelessness in the post-war Ukrainian SSR are studied thoroughly in Chapter 1 of the monograph, which were caused by war losses, a deep socio-economic crisis, famine, and the general disorganization of post-war society. The analysis of state policy on overcoming homelessness is critical and balanced: without denying

the existence of attempts at institutional response, the author demonstrated their limited effectiveness and formal nature quite convincingly.

The researcher's observation that child homelessness was not exclusively the Soviet phenomenon is crucial. The author placed the Ukrainian orphanhood issue in a broader European context, providing comparative statistics on the scale of orphanhood in post-war Europe. In particular, after the war there were about 49,000 orphans in Czechoslovakia, 60,000 – in the Netherlands, approximately 200,000 – in Poland, and approximately 300,000 – in Yugoslavia, in 1946, there were 147,000 orphans in Italy, about 200,000 – in Greece, and the total number of orphans in Europe was estimated at 13 million (p. 24). A comparative analysis of statistical indicators, in particular a comparison of the situation in Ukraine and other European countries (p. 41), strengthens the author's argument significantly and broadens the analytical horizons of the study. It is shown that during the post-war period, the Soviet state declared an active policy aimed at the so-called "cleansing" of urban space from homeless and neglected children, with the involvement of the police and the public. At the same time, the authorities adopted numerous regulations and created commissions for the placement of children in need of the state care, designed to regulate measures to find a solution to the issue on child homelessness, which provides a proof regarding the scale and systematic nature of the state's declared efforts in this area (p. 45). At the same time, the author argued convincingly that these activities were mainly limited to identifying and removing children from the streets and temporarily placing them at the police stations and reception centres before finding them permanent homes. The issue on ensuring adequate or at least minimally acceptable conditions for children in these institutions – in terms of material, sanitary, and personnel resources – remained outside the focus of the state authorities. The reception centres suffered chronically from a lack of clothing, bedding, and qualified personnel, and children were often kept there for several months due to the critical overcrowding of orphanages throughout the republic (p. 64). Chapter 2 focuses on analyzing the conditions of orphaned children in children's homes in the postwar Ukrainian SSR. In detail the author studied the staffing and material resources of these institutions, the state of medical and sanitary services, the peculiarities of nutrition, daily life, and the organization of the educational process. Based on the archival sources and testimonies, the everyday life of orphanages is presented as a space of chronic deprivation, overload, and constant psychological tension. Due to the use of a wide range of sources, it was possible to recreate the everyday practices of children's lives and demonstrate the gap between the official rhetoric of state care for children and the real conditions of their existence. The author emphasized that due to a chronic lack of space and a significant number of children in need of placement, orphanages in the Ukrainian SSR were systematically overcrowded (p. 75), and unbearable overcrowding was one of the most pressing problems facing all institutions in the republic during the period under study (p. 98).

The material provision of orphanages remained extremely limited (p. 99), which resulted in a shortage of the most essential everyday items for the children. Chief focus is on the nutrition issues in the chapter: in orphanages, established dietary standards were systematically not observed due to unjustified cost-cutting and the replacement of prescribed products with lower-quality and cheaper substitutes. The author justifiably characterized the overall level of medical and sanitary care provided to children as extremely unsatisfactory (p. 110).

The staffing problems were also significant: the provision of qualified personnel for orphanages was hampered by a low prestige and inadequate remuneration of such work.

As a result, these institutions were often staffed with non-professional or poorly qualified personnel (p. 134).

The author provided inspection materials from the Komarivskiy Special Children's Home in Kharkiv region appropriately, which preserved in the State Archives of Kharkiv Oblast (p. 78) in order to characterize a comprehensive picture regarding the conditions under which orphans lived in specialized institutions. According to the archival documents, the state of care for children was critical, and at times catastrophic, adding further source depth and a high level of empirical credibility to the study.

There was covered the Soviet practice of patronage and integration of orphans into the "external" social environment – through collective farms, foster families, and mechanisms for preparing them for independent life in Chapter 3. According to the study, the state material support for children was extremely limited and insufficient, making it impossible to meet even the most basic needs (p. 143). In addition, the everyday lives of orphans were marked by chronic food shortages, which had a negative impact on their physical condition and capacity for adaptation (p. 150). Taking into consideration the collective patronage experience, the author made a well-founded conclusion regarding its low effectiveness as a form of care and upbringing for orphans. Although in the first postwar years this practice to some extent helped relieve the burden on orphanages, in most cases children's living conditions remained unacceptable even by the most modest standards of existence (p. 153).

A chief focus in the chapter is on the employment issue of adolescents under state care. As it was noted by the author, this issue remained unresolved during the entire period under study and at times took on a "competitive" nature between local authorities, which were obliged to ensure employment of adolescents, and industrial enterprises that often evaded fulfillment of these responsibilities (p. 171). One more conclusion is important that even under conditions of an acute need for labour during the postwar reconstruction, the ministries and agencies of the Ukrainian SSR did not demonstrate sufficient interest in employing orphaned adolescents, which pointed at the contradictions between the declared social policy and the actual practices of state care (p. 190).

The inclusion of appendices and an index of orphanages enhances the scholarly and reference value of the monograph significantly.

Overall, I. Bezliudna's monograph demonstrated the complexity and contradictions of the postwar reality of child orphanhood in the Ukrainian SSR, revealing the mechanisms of state care, everyday survival practices, and children's strategies of social adaptation in the context of postwar transformations. The study is distinguished by a solid source base, well-balanced generalizations, and an interdisciplinary approach, which makes it possible to reinterpret the social history of the postwar period in a new way. The publication constitutes a significant contribution to the national historiography and will be useful both for professional historians and a wide range of scholars engaged in the study of the 20th century social history.

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