

Inclusion in education: Its bonds and bridges

Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova^{a,*}, Darja Salnikova^b, Rostislav Kononenko^c

^a International Laboratory for Social Integration Research, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

^b Department of Higher Mathematics, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

^c Department of Sociology, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

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ABSTRACT

Social Abstract: Social capital is one of the core concepts in the studies of education. This concept is broadly used in relation to inclusion. At the same time, the analysis of social capital of parents of children enrolled in mainstream schools in post-socialist countries is still missing in the literature. Based on a survey carried out in Russian mainstream schools in 2020 – 2021 by means of regression analysis with interaction terms and principal component analysis, we attempt to fill in this gap by examining and comparing social capital types among the parents of children with and without special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). On the one hand, the parents of a child with SEND have limited access to social capital resources. On the other hand, the level of structural social capital is higher for this group of parents as compared with those who have a child without SEND. This indicates that parents of children with SEND seek to interact with other parents more often than parents of children without SEND and are more actively involved in activities of public organizations and associations. When school policies prove to be more accessible and inclusive, parents of children with SEND decrease their bonding and increase bridging ties. This study outlines the main challenges of acquiring the social capital in post-socialist cultural and political context and formulates recommendations on how to facilitate social capital of families of children with SEND.

1. Introduction

Inclusion is a principle and a goal of public policy around the world. According to the World Bank, ‘social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity’ (World Bank, 2023). As a broad concept related to the life-long and widely contextualized experiences (UN, 2016), inclusion embraces various institutions, public and private spheres, and informal networks and communities. The discourses on inclusion education are framed by the approaches to the legal and moral legitimation (Peters & Besley, 2014), global and local policy reforms (OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2022), professional development (Donath et al., 2023), and the development of inclusive culture (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Iarskaia-Smirnova & Goraianova, 2022). Various definitions promote and silence different voices, constitute the power relations, and enact or prevent values and practices (Hernández-Torrano et al. 2020; Kalinnikova Magnusson & Walton, 2023; Leijen et al., 2021). The discourses on inclusive education as a moral and political ideal of ‘inclusion for all’ (UNESCO, 1994), are

competing with pedagogical discourses on ‘inclusion for some’ (Leijen et al., 2021), as well as economic discourses that prioritize managerial effectiveness and educational attainments (Magnússon, 2019).

The debates on inclusion mostly address policies and practices of the global West with a lesser focus on the non-Western regions. The situation is less studied in post-socialist contexts, i.e. countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and former Soviet Union republics (FSU) (Florian & Becirevic, 2011; Stepaniuk, 2019). Russia and other post-Soviet states gradually and unevenly integrate into the global processes of reforming educational systems towards inclusion (Fylling et al., 2020; Hallett et al., 2019). The reforms are implemented with varying effects and intensity, affected by the common legacy of the state socialism and different socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions as well as diverging regimes of social policy, first and foremost in education.

Children with SEND (by SEND, we understand the conditions caused by developmental peculiarities, health problems or disabilities) in the Soviet period were educated in specialized schools. However, many children with intellectual disabilities and difficulties in verbal communication were considered to be incapable of learning [*neobuchaemye*] and excluded from education (a reference here would be nice, it is a

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: eiarskaia@hse.ru (E. Iarskaia-Smirnova).

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strong statement). If their abilities were considered sufficient, children with SEND would be enrolled in boarding schools with a program adapted for certain disabilities: schools for the deaf, blind, and children with ‘mental delay’ [*umstvennaia otstalost'*]. However, the resources were distributed very unevenly in accordance with the economic status of the region (Anderson et al., 1987). State support for families was not provided until the end of the 1970s, when the category “disabled child” appeared in Soviet legislation and benefits began to be assigned to mothers of children ‘disabled from childhood’ [*invalid s detstva*]. Parents often abandoned their children with SEND, leaving them in maternity hospitals or placing them in residential institutions because of the lack of support.

The model of special education for children with SEND survived the collapse of the USSR in 1991 when the first steps towards inclusive education were made with active participation of civil society organizations and professionals (Iarskaia-Smirnova & Goriainova, 2022; Roza, 2009). The development of regulatory frameworks has accelerated in Russia after the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012 (UN, 2022). Federal Law on Education #273 adopted on December 29, 2012 was the first Russian legislation to mention inclusion.

The transition to inclusion in Russia a decade ago still provokes a lot of debates. A cultural context for inclusion is gradually created due to the growing awareness about impairments and disabilities, tackling the issues of the development of infrastructure to support children, their parents, and adults with special needs and disabilities to widen their opportunities for life in the society. The epistemological turn towards inclusion has created a clash of ideologies. The inherited culture of segregation, coupled with a legacy of non-recognition of the citizenship rights of all, has re-enforced a path dependency, facilitating the reproduction of exclusion at different levels of the education system (Kalinikova Magnusson & Walton, 2023). Other claims originate from neoliberal ideology along with market economic reforms (Mladenov, 2017). In fact, inclusive education was introduced along with a neoliberal reforms that prioritized efficiency and cost-cutting. Special education institutions were reformed, closed, and merged with mainstream schools, whose resources turned out to be insufficient for inclusion. Mainstream school principals and teachers lacked the skills, knowledge, and regulations to provide educational services to children with a variety of SEND. In addition, parents themselves often did not understand what was the best way for their children with SEND to study and live. It was especially true for many families of children with SEND with low socioeconomic status. Inequality and availability of services in Russia varies and depends on the region of residence (Kulagina, 2019). Russia faces large regional disparities, which the inclusion policies have not overcome yet (Anastasiou et al., 2018).

However, the network of parental associations gradually expanded. NGOs shared experiences, information, films, teaching aids and programs on inclusion, raising awareness of teachers, administrators, politicians and policymakers, as well as the wider community on disability and inclusive education (UNICEF, 2012: 60). During the years of reforming the school system, parents voiced their positions and questions in various ways: they went to rallies, participated in polls, gave interviews to journalists, spoke in their own blogs and channels, and took part in public councils to consult the government. Public opinion polls in Russia show a gradual increase in awareness of inclusion and the level of acceptance of inclusive education (VTsIOM, 2021). Nonetheless, parents, their children, and adults with disabilities still experience stigmatization in cultural context. Creating inclusive culture, and producing and evolving inclusive policies and practices is not always a smooth process. Meanwhile, the sustainability of what has been achieved within educational organizations may be threatened by the external context (Iarskaia-Smirnova & Goriainova, 2022).

Various forms of relations, networks, and trust that are important factors of inclusion have not received due scholarly attention yet. Our research focuses on the problems of school inclusion of children with

special educational needs and/or disabilities in post-socialist Russia, using a concept of social capital. This article is based on the analysis of data from a survey of parents of children with SEND and parents of their classmates in Russian mainstream schools in 2020–2021. The overall objective of this article is to reveal the characteristics of social capital of parents of children with SEND in comparison to parents of children without SEND enrolled in mainstream schools in twenty two Russian regions. Another aim is to highlight how the perception of school inclusiveness affects various dimensions of social capital of both groups of parents. The article is structured as follows: we start by highlighting social capital as a conceptual framework to study inclusion. With this background as a point of departure, we formulate the hypotheses for our methodology that result in a section presenting our analysis. The discussion section addresses the results of our study juxtaposed to the existing research. The findings are summed up in the conclusion.

1.1. Social capital in educational context: How does it matter for inclusion?

School education affects people’s physical and psychological well-being, family lives, and participation in civic life (Schuller et al., 2004). Despite society’s efforts to promote social inclusion, children with disabilities continue to report feeling lonely and excluded, having limited contact socially outside of home, and encountering systemic barriers (Woodgate et al., 2020). Researchers point at risks of bullying, especially concerning the students with intellectual disabilities (Fredrickson, 2010), and demonstrate an important role of teacher training in building positive attitudes among the school staff and children towards students with SEND (Sharma et al., 2008). The attitudes of teachers (Campbell et al., 2003) and classmates towards students with SEND (Di Maggio et al., 2022; Georgiadi et al., 2012) are of crucial importance in inclusive education. These attitudes are considered in cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects (De Boer et al., 2010; Loreman et al., 2007). Lack of friendship, mutual understanding, and support negatively affects the engagement of students with disability in school contexts.

These issues are debated in relation to a concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). In this study, we rely on the network-based theory of social capital as resources embedded in one’s social network (Häuberer, 2011: 119; Lin, 2001: 75). To put it in the context of this article, we consider the ability of particular social groups, i.e. parents of children with SEND and parents of children without SEND, to access and to use the resources of social capital. Lin (2001) emphasizes that social capital is intended to produce returns for a social network actor. Accessed and mobilized types of social capital are of particular importance in that regard. The former reflects the degree of availability of social resources capable of producing returns, while the latter already indicates whether social capital resources are actually used. Putnam (2000) introduced a distinction between bonding social capital, which implies exclusive intra-group ties and bridging social capital, which means inclusive intergroup ties. Bridging ties, following Putnam (2000), are associated with democracy, tolerance, and inclusivity (Wise & Driskell, 2017), while intra-group (bonding) connections indicate various types of intra-group cohesion in contexts of exclusion and inequality. Similarly, Lin (2001) distinguishes between the patterns of social relations based on reciprocity and intensity of interactions, identifying bridging and bonding types of social capital. Bonding social capital reflects homogeneous social interactions. In contrast, the bridging type of social capital is characterized by ties with more diverse background characteristics and resources. In addition, Lin (2001) distinguishes instrumental and expressive types of social capital: the former associated with wealth, power, and reputation, and the latter associated with cohesion, solidarity, and well-being.

Studies of social capital in educational contexts have been extensive (Bartee & George, 2019), but only a few address the role of social capital with regards to inclusion and diversity. People with disabilities and their

families have largely been excluded from the broader social capital debate (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2004). The existing studies indicate that social capital levels among individuals with disabilities are lower when compared with those of the general population, as it is shown by the results of a survey conducted among adults with disabilities in Canada (Dimakos et al., 2016). Researchers point to the connection of social capital and inclusion in educational settings (McGonigal et al., 2007; McConkey & Mariga, 2010), between inclusive education and social ties formed by friendship and peer contacts at school, in employment, and living in the community (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018).

Allan et al. (2009) reflect upon the challenges faced by teachers and other public sector professionals in attempting to manage an increasingly diverse population of students, and with an interest in how social capital might enable an effective response to diversity in educational contexts. O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2005) critically approach Bourdieu's ideas on social capital to examine social inclusion challenges and develop appropriate learning partnership arrangements. With a reference to social capital theory, Jørgensen and Allan (2022) outline the main challenges experienced by staff in developing an inclusive school and reflect on some of the difficulties of fostering inclusion within an increasingly competitive and performance based educational system.

In their prominent study, Bunch and Valeo (2004) compared students' attitudes toward peers with disabilities in inclusive and special education schools. Their findings pointed at the development of friendships and more advocacy, as well as less abusive behaviour in inclusive schools. Friendships are often considered bonding social capital as they are often formed between people who share common characteristics or interests. An inclusive school environment provides a space for social interactions, which expands opportunities to make friends (Holt et al., 2017), develop social communication skills, a sense of belonging to a broader social group, and form support circles and patterns of positive social behavior. It is shown that the growth of social capital positively correlates with the admission of young people with disabilities from among the graduates of inclusive secondary schools to high school, whereas an insufficient level of social capital creates risks of exclusion and low expectations from continuing school education among adolescents with disabilities in Sweden (Allan & Persson, 2018). Young people with disabilities in Norway were more successful in building their relationships in broader social networks if they attended regular classes (Kvalsund & Bele, 2010). Allan and Persson (2018) highlight the significance of cultivating trust and confidence at schools as two elements of social capital that are strongly associated with the students' success.

The density and reciprocity of social contacts, especially in classrooms, affect the success of educational inclusion (Almquist, 2011; Van den Oord & Van Rossem, 2002). When friendships develop between people of different cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status or age, such relations can contribute to the accumulation of bridging capital which, in turn, can provide access to information and other groups or individuals (MacBride, 2012). Acquisition of bridging social capital in inclusive educational environments can become a way to overcome social exclusion in schools, communities, and society, and a means of improving social well-being (Muthukrishna & Sader, 2004). Communication between different children most effectively allows them to overcome prejudices and fears, and nurtures tolerance, acceptance, and understanding (Kart & Kart, 2021).

The results of studies on the inclusion of children with disabilities in education indicate that building and strengthening social ties has a positive effect on academic performance, emotional well-being and, in general, on the quality of life of children with disabilities. More active participation in extracurricular activities contributes to greater inclusion in social networks, the establishment of new ties, and the strengthening of already established ones. Some authors argue social capital to be a useful concept for building an international classification within the framework of a stronger inclusive education policy in Europe

as a basis for policies that can lead to improved health and well-being for all (Maxwell & Koutsogeorgou, 2012).

The research on social capital of children with SEND is steadily growing. At the same time, not only social connections with other students are important, but also relationships built within the family, between school and families, and in communities, thus integrating three levels of analysis of social capital – individual, family, and social (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2004). Social capital and its components in school, family, peer groups, and the wider community influence a child's choices, opportunities, behavior, and development, and also have a beneficial effect on educational outcomes (Vlachou & Koutsogeorgou, 2015: 86). Yet, there is a lack of studies on acquisition of social capital by their parents. In fact, families are the channels of intergenerational transmission of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Croll, 2004). This topic deserves more scholarly attention as family social ties can determine the accessibility of various types of social capital for children. In particular, Chenoweth and Stehlik (2004) showed that families of persons with disabilities demonstrate a high connection with bonding social capital and a low connection with bridging social capital. In other words, they communicate closely with other people and their families who have similar characteristics, for example with groups of people with similar types of disabilities (Vlachou & Koutsogeorgou, 2015: 92). Based on the research data from Slovakia, Banovcinova (2020) highlights the importance of an informal social network for the family with children with disabilities, which includes a wider family and non-profit organizations that help children with special needs and their families. With the state minimizing its role in creating a friendly environment, such social aspects as family, friendly networks, and connections between classmates and teachers are more in demand (MacBride, 2012: 102). The case studies in a book by Bjarnason (2011) explore ordinary families' experiences with disabilities in Iceland in the late twentieth century, raising important issues of families' access to social capital in a context of changing disability policies. One of such issues is a gradual shifting of care and responsibilities to parents and families at times of the economic slowdown. These are stories of resilience and human agency of several generations of families who were the explorers of disability deinstitutionalization and pioneers of inclusion (Hartas, 2012).

Studying parental participation in education through Bourdieusian analytical lens, Trainor (2010) provides examples of how disability becomes salient when parents acquire and use cultural and social capital in educational contexts. Network closure can become a strategy to prevent the access to valuable social resources (Rostila, 2011) for children with SEND and their families. Family members help their children with disabilities, identify important "gatekeepers" among teachers, and assist them in developing relationships that increase their access to social capital (Gotto et al., 2010). Cox et al. (2021) examine school-based networks that provide valuable resources to parents and study factors associated with greater access within a racially and socioeconomically diverse school. Cleland and Lumsdon (2021) argue that an increased parental participation in children's learning has a positive impact on children's achievements. These authors emphasize the importance of improving communication and relationships between schools and parents, supporting their sense of belonging, and enhancing parental agency and competence.

With this study, we would like to contribute to the studies of parental social capital by considering the effect of perceived school inclusiveness. We are interested whether or not the level of social capital is lower for parents of a child with SEND as compared with parents of a child without SEND. We suppose that the level of bridging social capital is higher in schools considered to be highly inclusive as compared with schools perceived by parents as non-inclusive. It would also be of interest to see whether bonding ties are typical of schools that are perceived as non-inclusive.

2. Data and method

The data were collected as a part of the online survey study undertaken in post-Soviet countries over the period 2020 – 2021. The main objective of this survey was to reveal the attitudes of parents and teachers toward inclusive education and to measure the level of social capital as a concept closely related to inclusion. We posited the following research questions: What are the characteristics of social capital acquired by parents of children with SEND in comparison to parents of children without SEND enrolled in mainstream schools? How do the school conditions affect the social capital of both groups of parents?

We interviewed teachers and parents of children educated in mainstream schools by using One-Click Survey software. The respondents were approached through associations of inclusive schools and non-governmental organizations in the field of social issues and inclusion. It is important to highlight that our survey covered only those parents whose children attended mainstream schools that enroll children with and without SEND. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on the Russian sample of parents. The total number of observations used in the analysis in this article was 3533, including 78 % parents of children without SEND, 22 % with SEND.

The following social capital dimensions comprise the core set of indicators:

The first indicator includes the number of people whose support a respondent's family can rely on to overcome a difficult situation. This indicator measures the number of potentially available resources embedded in social networks. The original scale started with 1 standing for "the absence of such people". To make the interpretation more intuitive, we transformed the scale by subtracting the minimum value from each value of the variable.

The second indicator refers to the frequency of communication with parents of children without SEND. The scale of the variable is ordinal and includes five categories, where 1 and 5 stand for the highest (every day / nearly every day) and the lowest frequency (never), respectively. For easier interpretation, the scale was converted in such a way that the higher the value of the indicator, the higher the frequency of communication with a given group of parents.

The third indicator addresses the frequency of communication with parents of children with SEND. The information on the original scale and its transformation are the same as above.

The fourth indicator measures the degree of social engagement. The original wording of the question was: "Do you belong to any public organization / association, or do you conduct any other public activities?" The participants of the survey were given four response options per choice: "I have never belonged to a public organization / association", "I was a member of such an organization / association", "I am a member of such an organization / association, but am not actively involved", and "I am a member of such an organization / association and actively involved". Both the second and the third option imply the limited access to resources of public organizations, so we considered it possible to combine them into one response category.

In addition, we control for a number of characteristics of parents. It is important to grasp the differences between the two groups of respondents: the parents who have at least one child with SEND and the ones who do not have a child with SEND. In line with this, we use a dummy-variable that takes the value 1 if a participant of the survey has a child with SEND and 0 otherwise. In our survey, we asked the respondents to indicate their extent of agreement with the statement that his or her child's school implements inclusive education. Interpreting the answers within the 5-point scale that measures the degree of agreement, we hereafter refer to the resulting value as the degree of 'inclusiveness'.

According to our hypotheses, bridging and bonding types of social capital are pronounced to different degrees depending on the extent to which inclusiveness is implemented in a given school. We transformed

the original 5-point scale in such a way that the higher value signifies the stronger agreement with the statement given above, and the initial value of the transformed variable is 0. This transformation makes the interpretation of conditional effects in regression models with interaction terms meaningful. [Table A1](#) (see [Appendix](#)) presents descriptive statistics for the key variables given above. They were calculated based on the sample of 3,533 observations. Regression outputs in the next section "Results" report slightly different sample sizes due to some missing data in control variables.

Besides the key variables, we control for the following respondents' characteristics.

Gender. This variable is a binary indicator with "male" used as a reference category.

Age. Some values of the age variable turned out to be implausible. To fix this, we identified the univariate outliers on the basis of Tukey's (Tukey, 1977) method of detecting outliers and deleted them before conducting analyses.

Education. The variable is coded as a binary one with value 1 standing for higher education.

Settlement types are presented as a set of binary indicators for a metropolitan city, i.e. a city having a population of 1 million and above, urban, and rural areas.

[Table A3](#) (see [Appendix](#)) compares the two groups of parents, namely those parents who do not have children with SEND and the ones who have at least one child with SEND, based on a set of chosen control variables. The results indicate that there are significant differences between the groups in terms of the level of education. The proportion of people with tertiary education is higher within the group of parents of a child without SEND than among the ones who have at least one child with SEND. With regard to all other control variables (gender, age, types of settlement) no significant differences were observed.

The methodology relies on three main steps. The first step is to identify the key dimensions of social capital. To construct the indices of social capital, we apply principal component analysis (PCA). PCA is one of the most popular dimensionality reduction techniques (Jolliffe, 2002: 8 – 9). This method allows for reducing the number of input variables while keeping as much of the information in the original dataset as possible. PCA performs a linear transformation in such a manner that the first principal component (in this study, the first index of social capital) explains the largest possible proportion of data variation. At the next step of the study, we provide a descriptive statistical analysis to detect differences in mean levels of social capital dimensions constructed at the previous step between parents of children without SEND and parents of children with SEND. In particular, we construct confidence intervals for the means based on the samples of the former and of the latter group of parents and compare them. At the third step, we test the hypothesis suggesting a higher level of bridging social capital in schools perceived by parents as more inclusive. At the same time, we hypothesized that bonding social capital is more typical of schools perceived by parents as less inclusive. Thus, we need to take into account not only the formal status of a school, but also whether parents assess education in their child's school as inclusive. Their perception serves as an indicator of whether inclusive practices are being implemented effectively in schools. To test the moderation effect produced by the perception of inclusive education implemented in a given school, we run a set of regression models with interaction terms.

Such indicators as the frequency of communication with parents of children without SEND and the frequency of communication with parents of children with SEND were used as response variables in regression models. Since the categories of the frequency of communication variables have an ordering, we apply ordinal logistic regression. Dividing the respondents into two groups depending on whether they have a child with SEND enables us to take into account to what extent the social relations built by parents are homogeneous. In other words, we are interested in whether the parents of schoolchildren interact with mainly similar people, or, on the contrary, their social networks represent a

wide heterogeneous range of communication. For parents of a child with SEND, the higher frequency of communication with parents of a child without SEND would point at the heterogeneity of social networks. For the other group of parents, communication with parents of a child with SEND would indicate higher bridging social capital. In order to reveal these differences, one of the key predictors in the regression models is having at least one child with SEND. We also added the interaction term between the variables indicating the presence of a child with SEND and parents' extent of agreement with the statement that their child's school implements inclusive education. This enabled us to assess the significance of differences in the effect of the implementation of inclusive education at school on social capital between different groups of parents. In line with this, the model specification is as follows:

$$\ln \ln \left(\frac{P(y_i \leq j)}{P(y_i > j)} \right) = \alpha_j - b_0 - b_1 D_i - b_2 I_i - b_3 I_i D_i - \gamma C$$

y_i is a dependent variable indicating the frequency of communication with parents of children with / without SEND;

α_j is an intercept indicating where the density of the underlying latent variable is cut to differentiate the adjacent categories of the outcome variable;

D_i is a dummy-variable for having a child with SEND.

I_i is a variable indicating the extent of agreement of a parent with the statement that their child's school implements inclusive education;

$I_i D_i$ is the interaction term between having a child with SEND and subjective rating of inclusive education implemented in a given school;

C is a vector of control variables; b, γ are the corresponding slope coefficients;

i is a number of observations varying across the parents participating in the survey.

3. Results

As it was discussed in previous sections, the concept of social capital has a multidimensional structure. According to the Kaiser criterion (Jolliffe, 2002: 114–115), we extracted two dimensions of parents' social capital on the basis of PCA by retaining only those principal components whose eigenvalues exceeded 1. Table 1 provides the results of constructing social capital indices by means of this method. Each principal component can be considered as a weighted linear combination of the original social capital indicators. The first principal component explains nearly 40 % of the total variance. The weights for all the original variables are positive, which implies that the increase in each of the input social capital measures used in this study contributes positively to the first index.

Fig. 1 demonstrates how strongly the social capital variables are related to the constructed principal components. The first dimension (PC1) is represented along the horizontal axis. If we project the vector variables onto this axis, we see that the vectors for the frequency of

Table 1
The results of constructing social capital indices by means of PCA.

Indicator	PC1	PC2	PC3	PC4
Social engagement	0.374	-0.384	-0.843	-0.041
The number of potentially available sources of support	0.144	-0.873	0.456	0.089
Frequency of communication with parents of a child without SEND	0.649	0.165	0.246	-0.701
Frequency of communication with parents of a child with SEND	0.647	0.252	0.138	0.707
Percent of variance explained by PC	39.942 %	25.549 %	21.976 %	12.533 %

Notes: The calculations are made by the authors based on the sample containing both parents who do not have children with SEND and the ones who have at least one child with SEND. PC is an abbreviation for "principal component". PCs are presented in descending order by the amount of the explained variance.

communication variables have the biggest length. Therefore, these variables have the most weight versus social engagement and the number of potentially available sources of support in the first index. The angles between the original vector variables and the first index show that the frequency of communication variables are most strongly correlated with the first principal component. In line with this, the first index can be considered as a quantitative characteristic of parental interpersonal relationships and conceived as a composite measure of structural social capital. This dimension of social capital describes the impersonal configuration and the overall pattern of linkages between actors, without taking into account the quality of interactions (Granovetter, 1992; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

The next principal component (PC2) is the second highly informative index, which explains nearly 26 % of the data variation. The results of the second index demonstrate that social engagement and the number of potentially available sources of support have negative weights, while the indicators of the communication frequency are positively related to the first index. The second dimension (PC2) is represented along the vertical axis (see Fig. 1). The vector projection shows that the "number of potentially available sources of support" variable enters the second principal component with the highest weight. We suggest that the second index expands the interpretation of social capital by accounting for the quality of social relations and access to social capital resources. In other words, the second dimension is related to social capital considered in terms of its capacity, or accessed social capital as it was defined by Lin (2008: 50–70). For convenience, the social capital indices are adjusted to a single continuous scale from 0 to 10: the higher the value of the index, the higher the level of social capital. The signs of the weights for the second index were converted so that its higher values denote higher accessed social capital. At the next step, we tested whether there were significant differences in social capital between those parents whose child does not have SEND and the ones of a child with SEND. Table 2

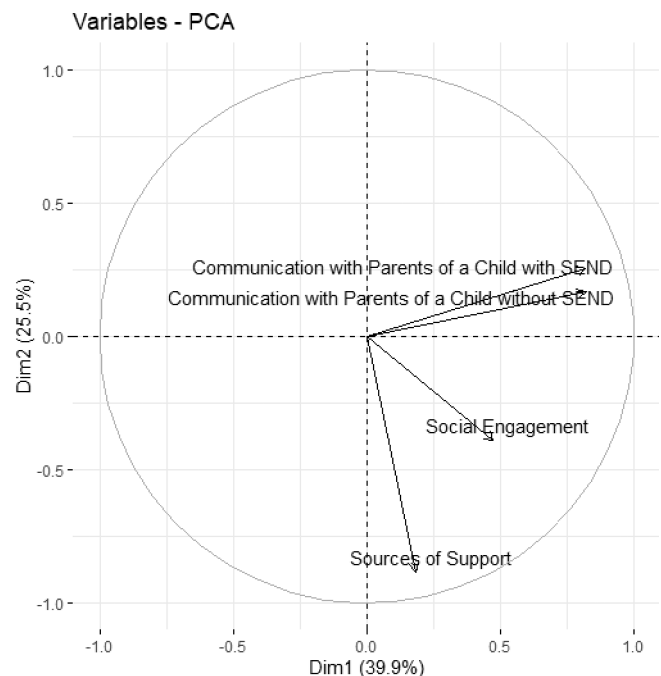


Fig. 1. Visualization of connections between the original variables and the first two principal components. Notes: The visualization is built by the authors on the basis of the PCA results. Dim1 and Dim2 stand for the first and the second dimension, respectively. The length of vector projection on a given axis indicates the weight with which the original variable enters the corresponding index. The squared cosine of the angle between a vector and one of the axes is the correlation coefficient between its corresponding variable and principal component.

displays mean values of the social capital indices accompanied by 95 % confidence intervals. The results demonstrate that parents of a child with SEND are more involved in interpersonal relationships. However, parents of a child without SEND have a higher level of accessed social capital, which implies that this group of parents gains a greater access to social capital resources and gets higher returns from them. Since the confidence intervals do not overlap, the differences turn out to be significant.

Table 3 displays the results of testing the hypothesis about the dependence of bridging and bonding types of social capital on the subjective measure of school inclusiveness. Since the raw coefficients are transformed into odds ratios, the regression coefficient higher than 1 indicates the positive effect produced by a given predictor variable on the response variable. Respectively, when the coefficient value is less than 1, it implies that the corresponding effect is negative. Since the regression models include interaction effects, the coefficients for the key variables are interpreted in terms of conditional effects, i.e., under the condition that the moderator variable equals 0.

According to the findings, if a parent completely disagrees with the statement that their child’s school implements inclusive education, having at least one child with SEND increases the frequency of communication with both groups of parents with all other variables being equal. In other words, parents of a child with SEND attending a school that our respondents perceive as non-inclusive have on average a higher level of bridging social capital. Conversely, if a parent does not have a child with SEND, they tend to communicate with other parents less frequently. This finding is true for schools perceived by parents as non-inclusive. At the same time, the increase of perceived school inclusiveness contributes positively to bridging the social capital of those parents who do not have a child with SEND. The coefficient for the interaction term in Model 2 is statistically significant, which indicates that there is a mutual effect of having a child with SEND and the subjective measure of school inclusiveness on the frequency of communication with parents of a child with SEND. This coefficient suggests that having at least one child with SEND, on average, reduces the positive effect of perceived school inclusiveness on the frequency of communication with other parents of a child with SEND by 13.7 %, which indicates that the level of bonding social capital decreases.

To gain a better understanding of what shapes the perception of school inclusiveness, we examined additional survey items, in particular, how they are related to the subjective overall assessment of school inclusiveness. The first two survey items measure the extent of agreement with the statements that 1) the school equipment allows for educating children with SEND without any problems 2) the school staff (the presence of tutors) allows them to educate children with SEND without any problems. The third survey item that is of interest indicates how much the parents are satisfied with the knowledge and skills of the school teachers in inclusive education. Since the variables are ordinal, we measured the strength of the relationship between them by calculating polychoric correlations. The highest correlation (0.707) was observed between the overall perception of school inclusiveness and parents’ satisfaction with the knowledge and skills of the school teachers

Table 2
Mean values of the social capital indices depending on having a child with SEND.

Group	Index 1: Composite measure of structural social capital	Index 2: Accessed social capital
Parents of a child without SEND	3.520 [3.449; 3.592]	5.295 [5.236; 5.355]
Parents of a child with SEND	5.155 [4.987; 5.324]	4.515 [4.378; 4.652]

Notes: The calculations are made by the authors on the basis of the PCA results. The 95% confidence intervals are given in the square brackets.

Table 3
The effect of perceived school inclusiveness on social capital: differences between the parents of a child with SEND and the ones of a child without SEND.

	Dependent variable:	
	Communication with Parents of a Child without SEND (1)	Communication with Parents of a Child with SEND (2)
Perceived School Inclusiveness	1.063* (0.034)	1.321*** (0.044)
Having a child with SEND	2.269*** (0.389)	6.069*** (1.102)
Female	1.460*** (0.194)	1.192 (0.164)
Age	1.003 (0.005)	1.015*** (0.005)
Higher education	1.454*** (0.091)	1.276*** (0.082)
Settlement type: urban	0.782** (0.082)	0.729*** (0.077)
Settlement type: rural	1.151 (0.143)	0.890 (0.111)
Perceived School Inclusiveness × Having a Child with SEND	0.950 (0.060)	0.863** (0.057)
Observations	3,440	3,446
Log Likelihood	−5,275.257	−4,851.808

Notes: This output presents the regression estimates in terms of odds ratios. Standard errors are given in parentheses. Significance codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1.

in inclusive education. The variable representing the overall perception of school inclusiveness is also positively correlated with assessments of the school equipment and the school staff. However, the strength of the relationship turns out to be rather moderate. The observed differences in the extent of the association between separate survey items and the overall assessment of school inclusiveness may stem from inconsistency across domains of educational inclusion. A recent study (Pirker et al., 2023) has revealed significant intrapersonal differences in the students’ perception of academic, social, and emotional dimensions of inclusion. Regarding the relationship between a general perception of educational inclusion and its separate dimensions, the results were also inconsistent. Therefore, keeping in mind the observed inconsistency between the survey items measuring the attitudes towards school education and school equipment on the one hand, and the overall assessment of school inclusiveness on the other, we use only the latter overall measure as the key explanatory variable in regression models. Furthermore, since the wording of the aforementioned questions about the school equipment and school staff do not refer the respondents to inclusiveness itself, it would be incautious to interpret them directly in terms of perception of school inclusiveness and use them interchangeably as different measures of the perceived educational inclusion.

Additionally, we take into consideration different types of disabilities. The distribution of disability types in the population of parents reporting his or her child’s disability is presented in Table A2 (see Appendix). In its turn, Table 4 reports the results based on the division of the sample into 3 categories: parents of a child without SEND, parents of a child with physical disabilities, and parents of a child with mental disabilities. Models 3 and 4 show that on average, parents of a child with SEND tend to communicate with other parents more frequently than parents of a child without SEND. This finding is true for both groups of parents, namely those parents who have a child with physical disabilities and the ones who have a child with mental impairments. Models 5 and 6 test the mutual effect of the overall perception of school inclusiveness and having a child with SEND. The results support the finding that suggests that having at least one child with SEND reduces the positive

Table 4
The effect of perceived school inclusiveness on social capital: taking into account the types of disabilities.

	Dependent variable:			
	Communication with parents of a child without SEND (3)	Communication with parents of a child with SEND (4)	Communication with parents of a child without SEND (5)	Communication with parents of a child with SEND (6)
Having a child with physical Disabilities	2.024*** (0.265)	3.179*** (0.437)	2.003** (0.624)	3.725*** (1.220)
Having a child with mental Disabilities	2.120*** (0.203)	5.958*** (0.608)	3.078*** (0.711)	12.267*** (3.047)
Perceived school inclusiveness	1.042 (0.030)	1.273*** (0.038)	1.063* (0.034)	1.326*** (0.044)
Female	1.506*** (0.203)	1.217 (0.170)	1.493*** (0.202)	1.197 (0.168)
Age	1.003 (0.005)	1.016*** (0.005)	1.003 (0.005)	1.016*** (0.005)
Higher education	1.439*** (0.092)	1.289*** (0.085)	1.431*** (0.092)	1.281*** (0.085)
Settlement type: urban	0.783** (0.084)	0.725*** (0.079)	0.792** (0.085)	0.743*** (0.081)
Settlement type: rural	1.152 (0.148)	0.931 (0.119)	1.170 (0.150)	0.958 (0.123)
Perceived school inclusiveness × Having a child with physical Disabilities			0.114	0.110
Perceived school inclusiveness × Having a child with mental Disabilities			0.863*	0.755***
Observations	3,267	3,270	3,267	3,270
Log Likelihood	-5,012.516	-4,565.903	-5,010.923	-4,560.788

Notes: This output presents the regression estimates in terms of odds ratios. Standard errors are given in parentheses. Significance codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1.

effect of perceived school inclusiveness on the frequency of communication with other parents of a child with SEND. However, this is true only for those parents who have a child with mental disabilities.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we asked the following research questions: what are the characteristics of social capital acquired by parents of children with SEND in comparison to parents of children without SEND enrolled in mainstream schools? How do the school conditions affect the social capital of both groups of parents?

Parents of a child without SEND have a higher level of accessed social capital, which means that they tend to gain a greater access to social capital resources and get higher returns from them. This result is in line with our first hypothesis. Speaking in terms of Lin’s (2001) concept of social capital, both instrumental and expressive purposes motivate parents of a child without SEND to employ the resources of social capital. Instrumental actions result in a greater allocation of socio-economic and political resources to an individual, in particular, financial profit, socio-economic status, political authority, and reputation. Regarding expressive action, people aim to maintain and protect cohesion, solidarity, and well-being (Lin et al., 2001). In its turn, the accessibility to social capital resources depends on a structural position an individual occupies within the social network. Parents of a child with SEND, being a more vulnerable group, tend to have less access to social capital resources.

Bridging ties are important for access to opportunities, and parents

make efforts to develop and sustain many peripheral social ties outside their bonded social networks (Gotto et al., 2010). Despite limited access to social capital resources of parents who have a child with SEND, the composite measure of structural social capital is higher for this group of parents as compared with those who have a child without SEND. This means that parents of a child with SEND more often seek communication with other parents and are more actively involved in activities of public organizations and associations.

We also tested whether the patterns of social relations among parents varied depending on the level of school inclusiveness. Our study demonstrated that in schools perceived as non-inclusive, parents of children with SEND interact with other parents more often than parents of children without SEND. This finding is confirmed for both parents who have a child with physical disabilities and the ones who have a child with mental impairments. They seek communication with both parents of a child with SEND and parents of a child without SEND, which makes their social networks heterogeneous. This implies that in schools considered as non-inclusive, parents of a child with SEND on average have a higher level of bonding and bridging types of social capital than parents of a child without SEND.

Our survey has some limitations in terms of analysing the perception of inclusion in the schools where the survey participants’ children are educated. The absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of inclusive education complicates the measurement of this concept. It becomes even more difficult to quantify the perceptions of education inclusiveness. As it was mentioned above in the methodological part of the paper, to address the issue of terminological obscurity, the definition

of inclusion was proposed within the survey form before the set of questions related to perception of inclusion. In line with previous research (De Boer et al., 2010; Loreman et al., 2007), the survey proposed to measure attitudes towards educational inclusion across three dimensions: awareness about inclusive practices, emotional evaluation of inclusive practices, and inclusive-oriented behaviors. Nonetheless, since these survey items are related to the process of inclusion as a whole rather than inclusive practices in a particular school, we cannot employ these questions for the purpose of this study. Of course, we could include similar questions on different dimensions regarding the implementation of inclusive principles in a particular school, but this would have made our questionnaire overly cumbersome and time-consuming. Moreover, our study of perception of inclusion was exploratory in the sense that we tested whether the afore-mentioned dimensions were relevant for the former Soviet countries. To test our hypotheses, we chose the most direct way to quantify the overall perception of school inclusiveness, that is, the extent of agreement with the statement that his or her child's school implements inclusive education. Additionally, we addressed some indicators that are related to the assessment of inclusion in a school where a child is educated rather than the process of inclusion as such. However, these indicators do not offer an exhaustive description of educational inclusion. For this reason, it is incautious to interpret these survey items directly in terms of perception of school inclusiveness and use them interchangeably as different measures of the perceived educational inclusion. These indicators are not sufficient to build a comprehensive index of school inclusiveness.

Parents who agree that the school where their kids with SEND study is really inclusive tend to communicate less with other parents with SEND. In other words, their bonding capital decreases, which corroborates our third hypothesis. This is especially true for parents who have children with mental impairments. Such parents have more opportunities to accumulate bridging capital. This is also confirmed by the data on parents of a child without SEND. The more they consider their school as inclusive, the higher their bridging capital. These findings support the second hypothesis of our study. An inclusive learning environment becomes a means of achieving the success of all participants, and one of the key conditions is the involvement of parents and their trust in the principles and practices of inclusion (Allan & Persson, 2018).

These results are in concert with the previous studies (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2004) concerning the prevalence of bonding social capital in social ties of families of persons with disabilities who find themselves in rather homogeneous social circles (Vlachou & Koutsogeorgou, 2015). However, our results contradict the evidence that the lack of resources that allow children with disabilities and their families to participate in society makes it difficult to access social capital by wider social contacts. To explain this inconsistency, it is important to refocus the lens on the agency of parents of children with SEND. Many parents of children with SEND build and use social capital to both reify power hierarchy and support human agency in educational settings (Trainor, 2010). In post-socialist Russia, it was due to the initiatives of parents, the professional community and NGOs, that the pioneers of inclusion were able to consolidate themselves and influence government policy since the 1990s (Iarskaia-Smirnova, Goriainova, 2022: 4).

Thus, it is not surprising that parents of a child with SEND need to make ties with other parents. With this regard, it has to be noted that we rely on the subjective measures of social capital. Parents are asked to report how frequently they communicate with other parents and whether they are active members of public organizations and

associations. Self-reports may be biased if the perception of social interactions is shaped by aspirations of parents of a child with SEND to get involved and feel accepted by society. The other limitation is that in some cases, a lack of awareness of parents about their children's range of communications produces missing data, which may result in biased and inefficient estimates.

However, social capital should not be treated as a simple solution to social problems, especially those related to social isolation, marginalization, and/or stigmatization that characterize the contexts of school and wider social circles (Vlachou & Koutsogeorgou, 2015: 91). We have to admit that participation in the wider community is not easy to translate into policy and practice, especially with insufficient state support for vulnerable groups (MacBride, 2012; Mladenov, 2017; Završek & Fischbach, 2023).

Moreover, disability interacts with other structural elements of a student's social status and affects them, such as social class, gender, and ethnicity. In order to make friends, children need to contact each other and due to widespread prejudices, these contacts carry various risks, as these "meetings can reproduce and reinforce differences, as well as create social connections and friendships" (Holt et al., 2017: 1361). Further research is needed to clarify the processes of accession and the types of accessed social capital as resources that can be acquired through a single parent and through the groups of parents (e.g. Cox et al., 2021). Qualitative research methodology would be relevant to explore how parents differ in their access to capital that affects their ability to act and participate with schools (Cleland, Lumsdon 2021). Besides, further studies should look into how social capital is accumulated in a context of shared values, norms, and common practices in post-socialist context.

Researchers warn that in such conditions, the discourse on social capital allows shifting the blame from the state to people with disabilities themselves for not leading a more active social life, not having broader social networks, and not trusting other people more in general (Vlakhov, Kutsogeorgou, 2015). Therefore, it is important to foster social capital of parents and their children, improve communication between all students, find creative ways to include parents in school related activities (Trigoso et al., 2019: 38), engage families in curriculum related discussions and other critical decisions, attract community resources and various stakeholders, and promote friendly environments as valuable social resources that welcome diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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Appendix

Table A1

Descriptive statistics for the key variables.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Perceived school inclusiveness	2.31	1.13	0	4
The number of potentially available sources of support	3.18	1.61	0	6
Frequency of communication with parents of a child without SEN	3.05	1.45	1	5
Frequency of communication with parents of a child with SEN	2.40	1.33	1	5
Social engagement (Membership and participation in a public organization / association)	Categories1 (I have never belonged to a public organization / association)2 (I was a member / I am a member of such an organization / association but am not actively involved)3 (I am a member of such an organization / association and actively involved)		Distribution 66.03 % 27.63 %	
Parent groups	Categories0 (Being a parent of a child without SEND)1 (Being a parent of at least one child with SEND)		6.34 % Distribution 78.42 % 21.58 %	

Notes: This table is prepared by the authors on the basis of the original dataset reduced to a set of the key variables. The sample size is 3533 observations.

Table A2
Distribution of disability types.

Type of disability	Distribution
Visual impairments	8.31 %
Hearing impairments	3.92 %
Musculoskeletal disorders	13.69 %
Autism	11.95 %
Down syndrome	3.28 %
Other mental disabilities	35.58 %
Other disabilities	23.27 %

Notes: This table is prepared by the authors on the basis of the sample of those parents reporting his or her child's disability. The sample size is 1096 observations.

Table A3

Descriptive statistics: characteristics of the two groups of parents depending on having a child with SEND.

	Parents of a child without SEND	Parents of at least one child with SEND
GENDER	0.941 [0.932; 0.950]	0.964 [0.951; 0.977]
AGE	38.6 [25.919; 51.281]	39.9 [27.376; 52.424]
HIGHER EDUCATION	0.557 [0.538; 0.576]	0.477 [0.441; 0.512]
SETTLEMENT: URBAN	0.729 [0.712; 0.745]	0.726 [0.695; 0.757]
SETTLEMENT: RURAL	0.175 [0.161; 0.189]	0.160 [0.134; 0.186]

Notes: Proportions and mean values are accompanied by 95% confidence intervals.

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