

## **Kyrgyzstan's Social Protection Measures and Programmes**

To be presented in the session on “Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through social protection policies: successful social protection systems and social protection floors at the regional and national levels” to be hosted by the Division for Inclusive Social Development of UNDESA for 25-27 June 2018.

**By Gulmira Kazakunova**

---

Thank you very much, UNDESA, for the kind invitation to this expert meeting. I would also like to thank the EU Social Protection Systems Programme to have financially supported my and my personal assistant's trip to join the meeting.

It is my utmost pleasure and honor to talk to you about my country, Kyrgyzstan, and its efforts in addressing inequalities. As the president of an organization of persons with disabilities called Ravenstvo, and partner of Finnish organizations of persons with disabilities, I have accumulated many experiences on the disability rights issues at the national level as well as at the Central Asian regional level. This is because I have been facilitating project grant-making for organizations and groups of persons with disabilities for Abilis Foundation, a Finnish foundation run by persons with disabilities. Since 2002, Abilis Foundation funded 130 projects of organizations and groups of persons with disabilities across the country. I have also been part of Central Asian Disability Forum activities. Thus I am confident that I have accumulated profound knowledge and local insight on disability issues in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

First, I will present briefly the realities of social protection for persons with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan, and secondly, I will introduce a few promising initiatives. Lastly, I conclude my presentation with lessons learned and recommendations based on the experiences in Kyrgyzstan.

### **1. Realities of Social Protection Measures to Persons with Disabilities in Kyrgyzstan**

The number of people with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan in 2017 is more than 178 thousand people, this is approximately 3 % of the total population. Every year the number of persons with disabilities is growing. For the last 9 years since 2008 till 2016, the number of persons with disabilities increased by 58 477 people or by 48.6 %. In parallel, there is increasing number of children with disabilities.

There is a legal framework on persons with disabilities. There are following main laws of the Kyrgyz Republic: the Law on the Rights and Guarantees of Persons with Disabilities; State Pension Social Insurance Act, the Act on Basic Principles of Social Services in the Kyrgyz Republic; the Act on Guaranteed State Minimum Social Standards; the Law on State Benefits in the Kyrgyz Republic; and the Law on the State Social Procurement. Based on these laws, persons and children with disabilities are entitled to disability benefits including disability pension and some medical treatment. However, the monthly disability pension is too small to live on. Therefore, many persons and children with disabilities are dependent on their families or live in institutions.

When it comes to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Kyrgyzstan became signatory to it in 2011. After the signing of the CRPD, the

Government of the Kyrgyz Republic has approved a number of national programs that comply with the CRPD such as “A set of actions to ensure the rights and improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2014-2017”; the “Social Protection Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2012-2014”; the “Social Protection Development Programme of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2015-2017”, which ended in 2017. However there is no Programme in the country to specifically support persons with disabilities beyond disability benefits and social services.

At present ratification of the CRPD is very relevant and timely. It should be noted that there is the Action Plan of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018 on the implementation of the Programme of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic “Forty steps into new era” that is approved by Government Decree (№ 74 as of January 31, 2018). In the paragraph 319 of this Action Plan the Ministry of the Social Labor and Social Development is responsible in developing a package of documents for consideration by the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic by November 1, 2018. Draft documents on the ratification have been developed to get approval from the relevant ministries and agencies.

Despite these national laws and policies on disability rights, the situation of persons with disabilities in the Kyrgyz Republic remains unsatisfactory. Since the independence of Kyrgyzstan from the former Soviet Union, civil society organisations gradually started to be established. Many organizations continue to carry on the charity-approach to disability in their organizational activities as was conducted during the Soviet time. Gradually organizations promoting disability rights have been emerging in Kyrgyzstan. I am the president of the NGO of persons with disabilities, Ravenstvo, which is “Equality” in English and which is one of such organization. Our mission is to protect the rights and interests of persons with disabilities and to introduce the ideas of independent life and human rights-based approach to disability. Based on experiences of our members with disabilities, I have to say that persons with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups of the population in Kyrgyzstan. The health and social care system, inherited from the Soviet Union, considered children with disabilities and adults with disabilities as people that are “physically abnormal” and they have been isolated in closed residential care facilities. In spite of the progress achieved in the field of the human rights-based approach and home-based care, people with disabilities still have very restricted access to educational services, especially in rural areas. There is very limited access to healthcare, social welfare, culture, post offices, banking system, supermarkets and cultural centers, leisure and recreational facility, etc. They often face violations of their rights and freedoms even getting state-guaranteed public services. Mainly the social welfare is aimed at providing social benefits, and at the same time the delivery of social services is not adequately developed.

The most important factors restricting their access are poverty, lack of funds, lack of social workers, limited implementation of the laws and regulations even in the public authorities and local self-government bodies. Mainly this is due to the existing disadvantages and weaknesses with regard to the current attitudes and lack of professional knowledge and skills. Many people with disabilities are unaware about their rights and responsibilities and how to resolve legal issues. All this leads to the isolation of people with disabilities and their weak integration into the society.

Although sex-disaggregated data are limited, existing studies and delivered consultations have confirmed that girls and women with disabilities are experiencing more

discrimination against them comparing with boys and men with disabilities. Girls and women with disabilities have less access to education, employment and other opportunities in their lives comparing with boys and men with disabilities. In other words, the Kyrgyz social protection system doesn't function on an equal basis for all.

## **2. A Few Promising Programmes in Kyrgyzstan**

To address this situation of exclusion, inequalities and discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities, Kyrgyzstan has been implementing programmes in partnership with international organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities. I would like to introduce some of them.

### **1) The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

UNDP worked with and through the civil society organizations, decision makers at the high level and mass media to promote the issue of UN CRPD ratification. Initiatives described below raised the need for ratification of the Convention to significantly high level than it was before the start of the project. As a result, the Parliament Committee on social, education, science, culture and health issues adopted a decree "On preparation of the Kyrgyz Government to ratification of the UN CRPD" on November 27, 2017 and requested the Government to report on the results by November 1, 2018.

Some of the activities and results include the following:

- The detailed action plan with the financial costing was prepared to assist the government in making an informed decision towards ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). The action plan can be considered as a comprehensive road map, as it details the initiatives to be taken by the state bodies after the ratification of the Convention, as well as the financial cost of these initiatives.
- Analysis of the current legislation to identify existing discriminatory norms that infringe the rights of persons with disabilities, gaps and contradictions as well as their compliance with the norms of international law was held to support the Ministry of Labour and Social Development in implementation of the National Strategy on Sustainable Development. According to the results of the analysis, UNDP assisted in the drafting of laws aimed at the implementation of the political rights of persons with disabilities, as well as access to justice. In particular, the following draft laws on amendments and additions to the legislation were developed<sup>1</sup>. As a result, the Law "On amending some legislative acts on the rights and guarantees of persons

---

<sup>1</sup> "On the rights and guarantees of persons with disabilities";

"On elections of the President and deputies of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic;

"On referendum of the Kyrgyz Republic;

"On electoral commissions on elections and referendums in the Kyrgyz Republic";

"On elections of deputies of local assemblies.

with disabilities”<sup>2</sup> to eliminate some norms in legislation that infringe rights of persons with disabilities, including legal regime of the facsimile signature and status of sign language interpreters was signed by the President of Kyrgyzstan in June 2017.

- In 2016, UNDP assisted the Ministry of Labour and Social Development in monitoring of implementation of two documents adopted by the Government of Kyrgyzstan directed to improvement of legal situation of persons with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> Monitoring was conducted in all regions of the country by the commission established by the order of the Minister of Labour and Social Protection. The main conclusion of the monitoring commission was weak implementation of the above policy documents. Reasons for non-implementation were limited funds allocated from the state and local budgets, as well as weak capacity, staff turnover and lack of institutional memory. The proposed recommendations were considered at a meeting of the Government in January 2017.
- In 2015-2017, UNDP supported civil society organizations in holding public discussions on the need for ratification of UN CRPD. 300 representatives from more than 100 NGOs, government agencies and local self-governance bodies participated in eight round tables. As a result of these round tables, an appeal to the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan was signed with the request to ratify the Convention.
- Number of awareness raising activities and campaigns were conducted and sensitized both persons with and without a disability to change their attitude positively.

---

<sup>2</sup> The law contains the following main elements:

- a set of definitions, relevant to the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities was introduced into the law "On the rights and guarantees of persons with disabilities";
- in connection with the difference of the definition of "person with limited health abilities" and "person with disability", a number of laws are amended to replace the word "incapable" to the phrase "person with disability";
- establishes the right for persons, having problems with hands and vision problems, to independently sign any documents with the facsimile signature;
- persons with hearing impairments and speech disabilities were guaranteed the right to sign-language interpretation in various fields, and also the law determines the status of sign-language interpreters;
- the law "On education" is amended to provide PwDs with the necessary books.
- the rules on providing people with disabilities with information in accessible format was introduced (including websites of state and municipal bodies).

<sup>3</sup> 1. Action Plan for implementation of the programme for the development of social protection of the population of the KR, 2015-2017, approved by the Government decree no. 85 dated February 27, 2015 (section "social protection of persons with disabilities);

2. A set of measures to ensure the rights and improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the KR, 2014-2017, approved by the Government decree no. 650 dated December 2, 2013.

## 2) Upon request of the Government, the EU-Social Protection Systems (EU-SPS) Programme in Kyrgyzstan has a disability inclusion programme for 2017-2018:

The EU-SPS Programme proactively involved Kyrgyz women with disabilities as agents of change beyond predominant roles as objects of interventions, and greatly benefited from their expertise in contributing to create inclusive social protection system.

- The programme focused on three activities: 1) ToTs for university lecturers in disability inclusion and creation of teaching modules in Russian. In the training of trainers (ToT) for university lecturers in disability inclusion and disability studies, representatives of local DPOs, especially Kyrgyz women with disabilities, played a central role as trainers of university lecturers.
- 2) Collaboration with EU-Technical Assistance programme related to the large EU-funded Social Protection Budget Support to Kyrgyzstan. We have worked with them on disability inclusion and mainstreaming, where Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Finnish persons with disabilities played significant roles in different kinds of collaboration activities with EU-Technical Assistance Programme.
- and 3) Pilot delivery of disability-specific baby-boxes. 100 baby boxes were delivered to mothers with disabilities and mothers of babies with disabilities.
- Many of former grantees of Abilis Foundation, a Finnish foundation, turned into successful entrepreneurs and social enterprises. Such social enterprises of local persons with disabilities were actively engaged, for instance for printing materials at Epicenter and the hosting of the last ToT at Bridges Hotel.

## 3. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

There are still many barriers for social inclusion of persons with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan today. Many Soviet-oriented social protection policies and services continue to use a medical approach to disability and to segregate persons and children with disabilities from society. In addition, many civil society organizations still continue to apply a charity-based approach to disability and provide material helps to persons and children with disabilities. Many persons and children with disabilities are not at all aware of their own rights but have internalized the negative image about themselves. As a result, many persons and children with disabilities continue to be isolated in institutions or at home. Many women and girls with disabilities tend to experience multiple discrimination against them and do not enjoy equal opportunities as peers without a disability. On the one hand, this is the harsh reality of many persons and children with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan today. On the other hand, some **Kyrgyz persons with disabilities** started to accumulate great expertise and experiences on disability inclusion and mainstreaming. They **can play more actively roles in the work to develop inclusive social protection systems as the experts of inclusion**, as was particularly exemplified in the aforementioned EU-Social Protection Systems Programme. This is an important strategy to ensure inclusion of largely excluded population and to hear their voices.

As I introduced to you, few programmes try to introduce a human rights-based approach to disability and to make systemic changes. We need many more of those disability-specific programmes to ensure inclusive social protection system that enables equal opportunities for persons and children with disabilities instead of reinforcing the status quo. **More and deliberate efforts are needed to change the paradigm of our social protection system from medical and charity-based approaches into a human rights-based approach.** It is high time to do so not only on paper but also in practice.

There has been good trend and changes taking place in Kyrgyzstan. Very recently in the beginning of this year, the Government adopted new professions in the field of social work, such as personal assistant, physiotherapist and occupational therapist. These new professions are highly expected to change the way of social protection to persons with disabilities and to place them in the center as subjects with **appropriate decision making power**. The established teaching module on disability inclusion in the EU-Social Protection Systems Programme is expected to be used widely in the teaching curriculum of these new professions as well as in-service and pre-service social workers.

**Awareness raising of both persons with and without a disability, including decision makers**, is needed for them to comprehend disability rights and equal opportunities of persons and children with disabilities. Particularly many persons with disabilities in rural areas have not been exposed to the human rights-based approach to disability. Media staff needs to be trained in proper understanding of disabilities to disseminate appropriate information rather than reinforcing negative image of persons and children with disabilities. Likewise, **trainings for specialists** who provide public services and for all civil servants will be helpful in changing attitude. Important areas of trainings include ethics of working with people with disabilities. Trainings should be delivered on a regular basis with anticipating exams and obtaining certificates. To carry out these trainings with the support of NGOs of people with disabilities, the state social procurement can be actively used. More national budget should be allocated for state-led awareness raising trainings and campaigns.

**Education and employment** are priorities for persons with disabilities. Children and persons with disabilities are disproportionally underrepresented among highly educated and formally employed population, even though education right is universal including children with disabilities and employment quota is set for 5% for companies having more than 20 employees. Yet, these laws and policies are not materialized in practice. The government supports enterprises of persons with disabilities to some extent, which should be scaled up. Similarly, affirmative action policy can be applied to employ persons with disabilities in public and international agencies.

Social protection systems are naturally interlinked with many other sectors for making the final impact and changes in the lives of persons with disabilities. **Various kinds of accessibility** are an integral part of securing inclusive social protection. To adopt the Accessible Environment State Programme, we need to provide accessibility to buildings, ramps, sign language interpreter, technical opportunities for moving inside of the facilities, between floors and offices, provide a sign language interpreter and/or Voice Guide and/or assistant, well equipped public rest rooms in buildings in each floor, to increase the number of seats, convenient front doorsteps for entry and exit, and the introduction of a separate window for the servicing of deaf and blind people in public places that ensure public services. It is important to engage civil society organizations of persons with disabilities into these activities in terms of both counseling and monitoring.

Similarly, **an inter-sectorial approach** is needed for materialising inclusive social protection systems in Kyrgyzstan. More precisely, inter-Ministerial and inter-agency collaboration for disability inclusion and mainstreaming are essential. The issues of persons and children with disabilities are too often dealt only in the “line Ministry” of Social Development or alike. It’s necessary **to develop an inter-agency activities and establish database of disaggregated statistical data on persons with disabilities by categories and types**. Once again, engaging civil society organizations of persons with disabilities into this work is helpful, as they often have a lot of information.

Distinguished experts, as was introduced, we believe that we are moving towards the right direction. We are happy to share our experiences and at the same time learn from good practices and lessons learned from other countries.

Thank you very much for your kind attention and for this great opportunity.