



FORMATION OF INCLUSIVE POLICY TOWARD PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN UZBEKISTAN

Abduvaliyeva Mumtozxon Asilbekovna

PhD in Social Sciences, Associate Professor

Department of Social Work, NUUZ

abduvalievamumtozxon@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The article examines current trends in the development of legal mechanisms for the social protection of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Uzbekistan. It analyzes key reforms aimed at the transition to a social model of disability, the improvement of the regulatory framework, and institutional transformations, including the establishment of the Agency for Social Protection. Particular attention is paid to the development of inclusive education and the expansion of access to higher education. The study substantiates the need to create a barrier-free environment, enhance public tolerance, and further improve social policy in this field.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), more than 1.3 billion people worldwide—approximately 16% of the global population—live with various forms of disability. This figure continues to increase due to population ageing and the growing prevalence of chronic conditions directly associated with disability, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and mental disorders [1]. Globally, a new approach to the social protection of persons with disabilities has emerged, emphasizing their social integration and adaptation as key factors in fostering social relations grounded in equality, respect, and non-discrimination.

At present, the social policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan is undergoing

significant transformations, including with regard to persons with disabilities. The general trajectory of development in Uzbek society is associated with the reform of the social protection system. These changes are also reshaping the content and methods of work with persons with disabilities. This is обусловлено both the humanization of social relations, which increases attention to the interests of the individual, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the social space through the creation of a barrier-free living environment, regardless of health limitations. For Uzbekistan, the issue of social adaptation of this population group and the creation of conditions for a dignified life for persons with disabilities remains highly relevant.



In recent years, more than 40 regulatory legal acts aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities have been adopted in Uzbekistan. The country is transitioning from an outdated medical model of disability to a modern social model.

As of 1 January 2026, the total number of persons with disabilities registered in the republic amounted to 1,060,111. Compared to 1 January 2025 (1,020,757 individuals), this represents an increase of 39,354 persons, or 3.9% [2].

Uzbekistan is on the threshold of major transformations. In particular, in accordance with the new Constitution adopted in April 2023, the country is defined as a social state that prioritizes the protection of vulnerable groups and the creation of equal opportunities for all citizens. It is founded on the principles of justice, solidarity, and civil concord and represents a continuous process requiring an adequate response to changes in the economic, political, and moral spheres. A social state seeks to ensure *достойные условия жизни* and a favorable living environment for all citizens.

The inclusion in the new Constitution of a separate provision addressing disability (Article 57), as well as the legal recognition of the implementation of inclusive education, constitute clear examples of these transformative changes [3].

Another regulatory legal act that served as a catalyst for a fundamental transformation of the state's social policy toward persons with disabilities is the Presidential Decree of the Republic of

Uzbekistan No. 5270, dated December 1, 2017. It should be emphasized that this decree led to significant changes in the institutional foundations of social policy in the field of disability in the Republic of Uzbekistan and contributed to its modernization. Furthermore, the term "invalid" was replaced with "person with a disability" in the decree. This is considered an important step, as it shifts the focus from the individual's disability to the individual as a person [4].

The inclusion, for the first time, of the concept of "inclusive education" in the new Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education," adopted on September 23, 2020, marked another milestone in ensuring the rights of children with physical, intellectual, sensory, or mental impairments to equal access to education, taking into account the diversity of special educational needs and individual capabilities. In particular, Article 20 of this law states that "inclusive education is aimed at ensuring equal access to education in educational institutions for all learners, considering the diversity of special educational needs and individual capabilities [5]." This regulatory legal act represents an important step toward establishing an education system oriented toward equal opportunities for all learners, as well as expanding opportunities for children with disabilities by enabling them to attend general education schools within their local communities. Thus, the adopted measures contribute to the development of an inclusive education system that ensures accessibility and quality of education for all categories of children.



In this context, the Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education in the Public Education System for 2020–2025, approved by Presidential Resolution No. 4860, along with the comprehensive “roadmap” for the development of inclusive education, demonstrates significant progress in this area [6]. Within the framework of this initiative, in the 2024–2025 academic year, 1,195 children with disabilities are enrolled in more than 530 schools across Uzbekistan, reflecting the state’s commitment to creating an accessible and equitable educational environment for all learners, regardless of their physical abilities. Particular attention should be paid to the development of inclusive education within the higher education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which is regarded as a key direction of state social policy and the modernization of the educational sector. In the context of ongoing reforms aimed at improving the accessibility and quality of higher education, special emphasis is placed on creating conditions for the education of persons with disabilities and other individuals with limited health capabilities.

In accordance with the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030, approved by Presidential Decree No. UP-5847 dated October 8, 2019, one of the priority objectives is to increase access to higher education for socially vulnerable population groups, including persons with disabilities, and to create appropriate educational infrastructure for them [7]. This approach reflects the state policy aimed at fostering an inclusive society in which

every citizen has the opportunity to realize their intellectual and professional potential regardless of physical, sensory, or cognitive characteristics. Thus, the development of inclusive education within higher education institutions in Uzbekistan should be regarded as a key strategic factor for sustainable social development, aimed at ensuring the constitutional right to education, strengthening the principles of social justice, and expanding opportunities for self-realization of persons with disabilities. The implementation of the objectives outlined in the Concept contributes to the formation of a humanistic and equitable education system that ensures equal access to knowledge and professional development for all categories of learners.

In order to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens, including persons with disabilities, to access higher education, a number of regulatory legal acts have been adopted in the Republic of Uzbekistan, establishing mechanisms of social support for admission to higher education institutions. In particular, Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 417, dated June 2, 2018, approved the procedure for the admission of persons with disabilities to higher education institutions based on an additional quota [8].

Since the introduction of this regulation, there has been a gradual increase in the number of quotas allocated for applicants with disabilities. While 1,384 places were provided in the first year of its implementation, this figure reached 3,907 by the 2025–2026

academic year. The more than threefold increase in quotas reflects the consistent efforts of the state to expand access to higher education for persons with disabilities, strengthen the principles of social justice, and promote an inclusive education policy in the country. This

trend demonstrates the government's commitment to enhancing the accessibility of higher education for persons with disabilities and confirms the implementation of inclusivity principles within Uzbekistan's higher education system.

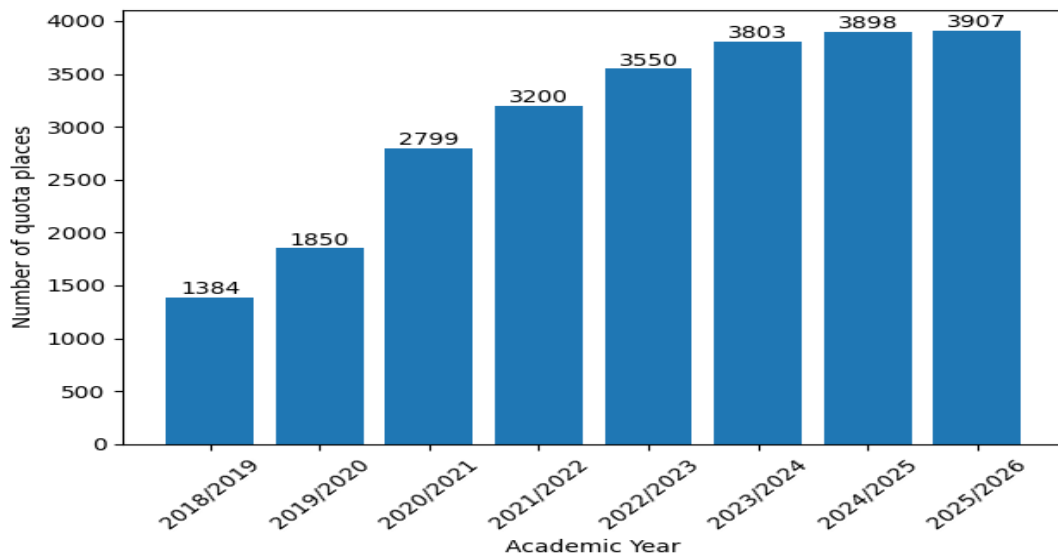


Figure 1. Dynamics of changes in the number of quotas for students with disabilities in Uzbekistan (2018-2025).

It is also important to highlight the updated Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," adopted on 15 October 2020, which constitutes one of the key regulatory legal acts aimed at protecting the rights and interests of persons with disabilities. Article 1 of the Law defines its purpose as the regulation of relations in the field of ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities. Article 4 sets out the fundamental principles, including respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities, their independence and freedom of choice, non-discrimination on the grounds of disability, equal opportunities in the exercise of rights and freedoms, respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their evolving capacities and

individuality, accessibility of facilities and services, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in public and state life [9]. A distinctive feature of this Law is the introduction, for the first time, of the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of disability. Article 6 provides the following clarification: "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference with respect to persons with disabilities, as well as the refusal to create conditions for access to facilities and services, shall be regarded as discrimination. Special measures aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities shall not be considered discrimination against other citizens."

This demonstrates that the protection of the rights and interests of vulnerable population groups constitutes a foundational principle of the ongoing socio-political reforms in the



country. A notable example is the ratification by Uzbekistan, on 7 June 2021, of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The adopted law explicitly affirms that the Republic of Uzbekistan recognizes the equal legal capacity of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with other citizens in all spheres of life. It should be noted that the ratification of the Convention was a long-awaited development anticipated by experts in the field of disability for many years. Uzbekistan signed the Convention in 2009, but the ratification process extended over 11 years. Owing to the political will of the President of Uzbekistan and the active engagement of civil society, the ratification was ultimately accomplished.

The establishment of the Agency for Social Protection of the Population marked a key stage in the institutional reform of the social protection system in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The Agency was created in 2023 in accordance with presidential decisions, with the aim of forming a unified, comprehensive, and coordinated system of social protection oriented toward individuals and life situations.

Prior to the establishment of the Agency, the social protection system in Uzbekistan was fragmented and characterized by departmental disaggregation. Functions related to social assistance, social services, benefit allocation, and work with persons with disabilities, children, older persons, and low-income families were distributed among approximately 10–12 ministries and agencies, as well as state funds and local authorities. These included bodies

responsible for employment and poverty reduction, healthcare, public and preschool education, economic development, finance, family and mahalla support, pension provision, guardianship and trusteeship, as well as local self-government bodies.

Such an institutional arrangement led to a number of systemic problems. First, the absence of a single coordinating body for social policy hindered interagency cooperation and strategic planning. Second, there was a duplication of functions and programs, as well as fragmentation of data on beneficiaries of social assistance. Third, the procedures for assigning social benefits and services were complex and bureaucratic, which reduced their accessibility for vulnerable population groups. Moreover, the system largely relied on a medical and compensatory model, in which priority was given to monetary payments rather than to the development of social services, poverty prevention, and social integration.

The establishment of the Agency for Social Protection of the Population made it possible to consolidate previously fragmented functions within a single state body, to form a unified vertical system of governance in the field of social protection, and to transition to a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and family-oriented approach. The Agency became responsible for the formulation and implementation of state policy in the field of social protection, coordination of the activities of all relevant institutions, development of social services, digitalization of processes, and maintenance of unified registries of beneficiaries.



By Presidential Resolution No. PP-41 of 3 February 2025 “On Additional Measures to Further Improve the System of Social Services and Assistance to Children with Disabilities,” a daytime care service for children with disabilities aged 3 to 18 was introduced [10]. The resolution is aimed at ensuring care for children with disabilities within a family environment, preventing social orphanhood, and creating conditions for parental employment and the improvement of families’ socio-economic well-being.

As of 21 November 2025, 534 daytime care groups had been established, providing care, education, and upbringing services to 4,093 children. The implementation of this measure enabled parents to enter the labor market, increase household incomes, and contributed to poverty reduction.

In addition, pursuant to Presidential Resolution No. 257, effective from 1 September 2025, the system of medical advisory commissions for the determination of disability has been completely abolished nationwide and replaced with a new procedure [11]. Citizens may now apply for disability assessment through:

- “Inson” social service centers;
- mahalla-based social workers;
- family physicians;
- the Unified Interactive Portal of Public Services (my.gov.uz).

The procedure for submitting medical documentation in electronic form to the Medical and Social Expert Commission (MSEC) has been significantly simplified. In addition, the list of conditions that do not require a

fixed-term disability determination (i.e., permanent disabilities) has been expanded, and a clearly defined перечень conditions has been established for which a medical examination is not required to determine disability status. In accordance with the new disability assessment framework, Uzbekistan has introduced a system based on the WHODAS scale, which focuses on evaluating an individual’s functioning and activity in daily life rather than relying solely on a medical diagnosis.

In determining disability status, the degree of limitation in an individual’s жизнедеятельность is taken into account, including the capacity for self-care, mobility, communication, learning, and participation in social life. The list of conditions eligible for disability determination has also been expanded: the total number has increased from 71 to 92 categories (an increase of 21), thereby enabling broader coverage of citizens in need of social protection. The introduction of these parameters is aimed at facilitating the transition to a medico-social model of disability, enhancing the objectivity of assessment, and ensuring targeted support for persons with disabilities.

However, despite a number of positive developments in Uzbekistan’s social policy, further improvement of the institutional aspects of social policy aimed at enhancing the quality of life of persons with disabilities requires the implementation of several key measures by both the state and society. Among these, particular importance should be attached to fostering a culture of tolerance toward persons with



disabilities within Uzbek society. From an early age, it is essential to promote positive attitudes toward children with disabilities by cultivating respect and tolerance for their differences through educational and воспитательные programs. It is also necessary to engage broad segments of the population, as well as representatives of governmental and social services, in raising awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities and in shaping positive perceptions of their needs and capabilities. This process should be accompanied by the dissemination, through mass media, of positive examples of interaction with and achievements of persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, it is necessary to continue developing accessible

infrastructure, support employers who create job opportunities for persons with disabilities, and intensify governmental and public initiatives aimed at involving persons with disabilities in various aspects of social and cultural life, thereby creating conditions for their active participation and self-realization. Only through coordinated efforts of the state and a genuine societal willingness to accept and include persons with disabilities can the necessary conditions be created to eliminate barriers and ensure equal opportunities, including access to employment, transportation, services, and education. Respect, rather than pity, should become the prevailing societal attitude toward persons with disabilities.

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