

This profile summarizes the legal and social context affecting persons with disabilities in Uzbekistan. Data in this profile was collated through research on country reports, articles, and published papers from supporting partners; government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and associations.<sup>1</sup> This brief first discusses disability statistics and then analyzes the constraints that persons with disabilities face in accessing health services, education, rehabilitation and assistive devices, employment, social infrastructure, and social protection. Next, the brief uses a variety of data, including from the Listening to Citizens of Uzbekistan project, to assess the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities. To conclude, the brief describes the legal and policy frameworks that guide Uzbekistan's commitments to persons with disabilities and identifies the main government and non-government actors and donors working on disability-related issues in the country.

**Key recommendations for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities** include bringing legislation and national policy in line with the provisions and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); harmonizing the system of statistics and data collection related to functional limitations and disability prevalence based on internationally shared definitions and tools; strengthening the interagency coordination and control mechanisms related to CRPD implementation; enhancing the capacity of local disabled people's organizations and NGOs; promoting norms and behavior change towards persons with disabilities; enacting the principle of universal design and accessibility; strengthening social services and case management practices at the community level by implementing the WHO community-based rehabilitation guidelines<sup>2</sup> using existing community structures such as *mahallas*; and advancing inclusive education and employment practices.

### Background Information

Uzbekistan's population has steadily increased in recent years to 34.6 million in April 2021<sup>3</sup>—60 percent of whom are under 30 years old.<sup>4</sup> The officially reported number of persons with disabilities is likely underestimated at 2.1 percent of the population, given that an estimated 15 percent of people around the world have some form of impairment, and about 80 percent of them live in developing countries.<sup>5</sup> These low official figures may be explained by the outdated (self-reported) disability assessment and

<sup>1</sup> For inquiries on this brief or disability inclusion, please contact the World Bank's Global Disability Advisor, Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo [cmclain-nhlapo@worldbank.org](mailto:cmclain-nhlapo@worldbank.org) and her team through the World Bank's project/country social development specialists.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. 2010. "Community-Based Rehabilitation: CBR Guidelines," May 12. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241548052>.

<sup>3</sup> The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Demography. ND. "The Number of Urban and Rural Population by Region." <https://stat.uz/en/official-statistics/demography>.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2020a. *Youth of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Prospects*. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/3541/file/Youth%20of%20Uzbekistan-%20Challenges%20and%20Prospects.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization and World Bank. 2011. *World Report on Disability*. <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>

determination system, which influences Uzbekistan's current definition of disability and state policies designed to support persons with disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

The social inclusion of children and adults with disabilities requires broad systemic changes and the adoption of a multi-sectoral approach that removes institutional and structural barriers to enable persons with disabilities to meet their basic needs—related to health, rehabilitation and assistive devices, economic and social security, learning and developing skills, and living in their communities. The strategy needs to target both mainstream social protection and social services programs and investing in new programs and services for persons with disabilities.<sup>7</sup>

## Core Data on Disability in Uzbekistan

### Disability Statistics

According to official administrative data, at the end of 2019, 693,900 persons with disabilities (295,500 females and 398,400 males), including 111,300 children under the age of 16 (48,800 girls and 62,500 boys) received pensions and social benefits in Uzbekistan.<sup>8</sup> This is not an accurate estimate of disability prevalence in the country, as it comes from the Ministry of Health and the Republican Inspection on Medical and Social Expertise, which are responsible for disability assessment and determination, and the non-budgetary pension fund under the Ministry of Finance responsible for the allocation of disability benefits.

Uzbekistan has not conducted a population census since it gained independence in 1991; its first census is planned for 2023.<sup>9</sup> However, the State Committee on Statistics does not include disability questions in the census based on the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, citing a lack of funds and expertise in determining disability.<sup>10</sup> In 2018, the World Bank included the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Functioning<sup>11</sup> in its nationally and regionally representative Listening to the Citizens of Uzbekistan (L2CU) household survey for the first time.<sup>12</sup> The survey found that about 13.5 percent of the population aged 3 and above had some form of disability, and 3.5 percent had severe forms of disability.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the survey results revealed that 45 percent of households had a member with a disability, and 14 percent

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<sup>6</sup> World Bank 2021.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics. ND. "Gender Statistics of Uzbekistan, Indicators of Persons with Disabilities, Number of Persons with Disabilities Receiving Pensions and Social Benefits." <https://gender.stat.uz/en/osnovnye-pokazateli-en/sotsialnaya-zashchita-en/invalidy-en/531-chislennost-zhenshchin-i-muzhchin-invalidov-poluchayushchikh-pensii-i-sotsialnye-posobiya-po-regionam-en>.

<sup>9</sup> Decree of the Cabinet Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "On Measures for the Preparation and Conduct of the Population Census in the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2023" No. 710 from November 11, 2020. <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5103146>.

<sup>10</sup> Gazeta.uz. 2020. "Disability Questions Were Not Included in the Census Program," March 3. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/03/03/disability-questions/>.

<sup>11</sup> Washington Group on Disability Statistics. ND. WG Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS). <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss/>.

<sup>12</sup> World Bank. ND. "Study - Listening to the Citizens of Uzbekistan." <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/uzbekistan/brief/l2cu>.

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2020b. "Building a National Social Protection System Fit for Uzbekistan's Children and Young People." <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/reports/building-national-social-protection-system-fit-uzbekistans-children-and-youth>.

have a household member with a severe form of disability.<sup>14</sup> Disability prevalence is highly correlated with age: 54 percent of those aged 60 or older have some form of disability.

The considerable difference between the administrative data on the reported number of persons with disabilities and the disability prevalence data derived from the survey can be explained by various factors such as the legal understanding of disability (which is conflated with illness and the inability to work); barriers to registering disability at the Medical Consultative Commissions (VKK) and Medical Labor Expert Commissions (VTEK); the costs associated with disability registration (e.g. transportation, particularly from rural areas to the city centers, preparation of the application documents; and cultural factors and associated stigmas that discourage children and adults with disabilities as well as their family members from registering their disability status.<sup>15</sup>

### Access to Health Services

- The UN's 2019 situation analysis of children and adults with disabilities in Uzbekistan showed that 25 percent do not receive the required healthcare services (compared to 10 percent of those without disabilities).<sup>16</sup> Persons with disabilities are almost three times more likely to lack access to prescribed medication.<sup>17</sup>
- Although persons with disabilities are legally entitled to privileges and benefits including free healthcare, they face numerous barriers to accessing medical services such as a lack of transport to health facilities (especially in rural areas). The UN found that twice as many persons with disabilities as those without disabilities reported not knowing where to access health services.<sup>18</sup>
- **Medical institutions lack appropriate accessible infrastructure** such as ramps, elevators, and sign-language interpretation services.<sup>19</sup> Persons with disabilities also reportedly face mistreatment by medical staff.<sup>20</sup>
- Persons with disabilities are entitled to an **Individual Rehabilitation Plan (IRP)** based on a VTEK medical assessment.<sup>21</sup> IRPs are meant to include rehabilitation measures—types, forms, volumes, timing, and procedures for implementing medical, professional, social, and other rehabilitation measures designed to restore, compensate for impaired or lost body functions, and allow persons with disabilities to perform certain types of labor.<sup>22</sup>
- In practice, IRPs are not usually assigned, since the VTEK staff lack proper qualification and expertise: **there are almost no specialists in rehabilitation and occupational therapy** to carry out a full medical

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and UN agencies (UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO in Uzbekistan). 2019. "Situation Analysis on Children and Adults with Disabilities in Uzbekistan," May 22.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2019. *Situation Analysis on Children and Adults with Disabilities in Uzbekistan*. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/3571/file/Brief%20PwD%20SitAn.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> World Bank 2021.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, "On Measures for Further Increasing the Efficiency of Medical-Social and Professional Rehabilitation of Disabled People," No. 307 December 23, 2010. <https://lex.uz/acts/1719576>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

and labor examination for persons with disabilities' social and professional rehabilitation.<sup>23</sup> Only 37.3 percent of persons with disabilities reported that they have an IRP; 50 percent were unaware of such plans, and 17.9 percent said they had not received one.<sup>24</sup>

### Rehabilitation and Assistive Devices

- **The government guarantees the provision of some assistive devices,** but not all persons with disabilities have access to them and many types of devices and reasonable accommodation are not available to them.<sup>25</sup>
- The 2019 UN survey revealed that only 26.9 percent of persons with physical impairments that require a wheelchair were using them; 73.1 percent of the respondents did not have access to a quality wheelchair.<sup>26</sup> Nearly half (43.6 percent) of the study participants expressed a need for assistive devices and services; 21.5 percent had access to them but only 2.8 percent had received the devices from state institutions.<sup>27</sup> Children with disabilities have considerably less access to rehabilitation tools and devices than adults; early intervention services are not provided, and families of children with disabilities struggle to access them.
- The government seeks to introduce market competition into the provision of assistive devices to increase the quality of products and services and to give persons with disabilities more choice.

### Gender and Disability

- **Double discrimination of girls and women with disabilities:** Official administrative data indicates that the number of girls and women with disabilities has decreased from 408,900 women and 68,800 girls under 16 in 2007 to 295,500 women and 48,800 girls in 2019.<sup>28</sup> The cause of this considerable drop in reported numbers is unclear, as disability is believed to be more prevalent among females due to their longer life expectancy,<sup>29</sup> which in 2019 was 77.4 for women and 72.8 for men.<sup>30</sup> For example, the L2CU household survey found that older people are more prone to disability.<sup>31</sup>
- **Gender-based violence:** Globally, girls and women with disabilities are prone to gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>32</sup> In Uzbekistan, the prevalence of such attacks is unknown. The government adopted

<sup>23</sup> According to the General Prosecutor of Uzbekistan Nigmatilla Yuldashev. *Gazeta.uz*. 2019. "On Bureaucracy and Corruption in Disability Registration," December 28. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/12/28/disabled/>.

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan 2019.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Demography. ND. "Gender Statistics of Uzbekistan."

<sup>29</sup> World Health Organization. 2008. *The Global Burden of Disease: 2004 update*.

<sup>30</sup> The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, Demography. ND. "Life Expectancy at Birth."

<https://stat.uz/en/official-statistics/demography>.

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2020c. *Building a National Social Protection System Fit for Uzbekistan's Children and Young People*.

<https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/reports/building-national-social-protection-system-fit-uzbekistans-children-and-youth>

<sup>32</sup> Ingrid Van Der Heijden. 2014. "What works to prevent violence against women with disabilities."

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089ade5274a27b20001e9/What\\_Works\\_Inception\\_Report\\_June\\_2014\\_AnnexW\\_Interventions\\_for\\_abuse\\_against\\_WWD.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089ade5274a27b20001e9/What_Works_Inception_Report_June_2014_AnnexW_Interventions_for_abuse_against_WWD.pdf)

two major laws in 2019 to guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women and men<sup>33</sup> and to protect women from harassment and violence.<sup>34</sup> However, survivors' centers are not always accessible to persons with disabilities.

- The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is providing technical assistance to the Government of Uzbekistan (GoU) to develop **standard operating procedures (SOPs) for GBV service providers in the health, law enforcement, and psycho-social sectors**. The Senate's Gender Equality Commission endorsed the SOPs, some of which apply to survivors with disabilities.<sup>35</sup> NGOs supporting women with disabilities were involved in the pilot SOPs on multisectoral responses to GBV in the regions of Uzbekistan that take into account the interests of persons with disabilities, but UNFPA Uzbekistan recognized that "a more detailed assessment of their situation of needs in terms of gender-based violence is needed."<sup>36</sup>

### Accessibility

- **Legal guarantees of accessibility:** A 1991 law<sup>37</sup> required state bodies and the private sector to create the necessary conditions to guarantee persons with disabilities unhindered access to social infrastructure. Article 12 stipulated fines and penalties for failing to fulfill these obligations, and Article 9 mandated the development of norms and rules for construction that take into account the opinion of the relevant public associations of persons with disabilities and Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations guidelines.
  - In accordance with Article 7 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 410<sup>38</sup> "On Labor Protection," dated September 22, 2016, paragraph 6 of Appendix No. 1 to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 263:<sup>39</sup> "On Further Improvement of Measures for Labor Protection of Workers" dated September 15, 2014, in order to protect and preserve the health of persons with disabilities, workplaces that employ persons with disabilities must undergo a certification process. This process will ensure the necessary access for individuals with disabilities, including those with visual, hearing and physical impairments.
  - Based on the results of the certification, enterprises that employ persons with disabilities must certify their sanitary-technical conditions in the manner prescribed by the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations.
  - According to Article 22 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 641<sup>40</sup> "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" dated October 15, 2020, persons with disabilities must be provided, if possible, with housing near their place of work, medical and rehabilitation institutions, in compliance with the principle of the accessibility of facilities and services. For example, persons

<sup>33</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men," No. ZRU-562 September 2, 2019. <https://lex.uz/docs/4494873>.

<sup>34</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence," No. ZRU-561 September 2, 2019. <https://www.lex.uz/docs/4494712>.

<sup>35</sup> UNFPA Uzbekistan. 2020. "Piloting Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on Multi-Sectoral Response to Gender-Based Violence in Bukhara Region." <https://uzbekistan.unfpa.org/en/news/piloting-standard-operating-procedures-sops-multi-sectoral-response-gender-based-violence>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Social Protection of Disabled People in the Republic of Uzbekistan," No. ZRU from July 11, 2008. <https://lex.uz/acts/1372498> (the law expired on January 16, 2021).

<sup>38</sup> <https://lex.uz/docs/3031429>

<sup>39</sup> <https://lex.uz/docs/2463975>

<sup>40</sup> <https://lex.uz/docs/5049549>

with disabilities can request apartments in state housing on lower floors. Those who have apartments on upper floors have the right to exchange them for apartments on lower floors, subject to availability. Apartments occupied by persons with disabilities must be equipped with special means and devices for free movement.

- Article 10 of the country's Town Planning Code requires the "creation of conditions for unimpeded access for persons with disabilities to social infrastructure facilities (residential, public, industrial buildings and structures, recreation areas, cultural and entertainment institutions and other facilities)."<sup>41</sup> A law that came into force in 2021 stipulates that the "design, construction and reconstruction of public buildings and objects, regardless of the organizational and legal form, should be carried out taking into account the needs of persons with disabilities."<sup>42</sup> There are also specific construction norms and regulations (SNiP) developed by the State Committee on Architecture and Construction,<sup>43</sup> sanitary regulations and norms (SanPin)<sup>44</sup> developed by the Ministry of Healthcare, and a legal framework that guarantees accessibility for persons with disabilities. The SanPin specifically mentions that "projects of facilities visited by persons with disabilities must be coordinated with the Uzbek Society of Disabled People."<sup>45</sup> Hence, in theory the development of public infrastructure has not been allowed without the adaptation of housing and means of transportation, communication, and information for access and use by persons with disabilities. However, the social infrastructure remains largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities and those with reduced mobility.
- **Lack of accessibility affects the livelihoods of persons with disabilities:** A recent analysis revealed that 85 percent of buildings and social infrastructure facilities in Tashkent city are not adapted for use by persons with disabilities<sup>46</sup> even though 70,000 live there, in addition to 300,000 older people. Nor is public transport in the capital satisfactorily accessible, which has serious socio-economic consequences for the livelihoods of persons with disabilities.<sup>47</sup> Insufficient access to the physical environment and reasonable accommodation violates the rights of persons with disabilities and discourages them from participating in public life, education, labor, and other activities, which affects their quality of life. Persons with disabilities, particularly those with physical impairments, are thus in forced social isolation, become highly dependent on others, and are deprived of urban citizenship.
- **Lack of enforcement and public monitoring:** The main reasons for the inaccessibility of public infrastructure are inoperative decision-making mechanisms that fail to account for the needs of persons with disabilities and those with limited mobility, a lack of enforcement and ineffective state

<sup>41</sup> Town Planning Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan from February 22, 2021. <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5307955>.

<sup>42</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," No. ZRU-641 from October 15, 2020. <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5049549>.

<sup>43</sup> ShNK 2.07.02-07 "Designing Living Environment, Taking into Account the Needs of Disabled People and Persons with Limited Mobility."

<sup>44</sup> SanPin No. 0092-99 "Sanitary Rules and Regulations for the Design of Residential and Public Buildings, Residential Formations Used by Disabled People and Low-Mobility Groups of the Population." <https://www.lex.uz/acts/1764509>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Paragraph 1.2 of SanPin No. 0092-99.

<sup>46</sup> Public Council under the khokimiyat of Tashkent city. ND. "'City for All' project. <https://gorod.uz/projects/5.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> F. Bakaeva and D. Muratova. 2015. "Analytical Report on the Results of Monitoring the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Access Transport Services." The National Centre for Human Rights of the Republic of Uzbekistan, UNDP in Uzbekistan. [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/uzbekistan/docs/NewsArticleAttachments/un\\_uzb\\_analytical\\_report\\_on\\_access\\_of\\_people\\_with\\_disabilities\\_to\\_public\\_transportation.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/uzbekistan/docs/NewsArticleAttachments/un_uzb_analytical_report_on_access_of_people_with_disabilities_to_public_transportation.pdf). United Nations (Uzbekistan). 2019. Situation Analysis on Children and Adults with Disabilities in Uzbekistan. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/3571/file/Brief%20PwD%20SitAn.pdf>.

oversight, as well as insufficient public monitoring of the implementation of legal requirements related to accessibility. At the same time, NGOs that represent persons with disabilities are actively involved in the development and monitoring of legislation. For example, with the direct and active participation of persons with disabilities, under the guidance of the Association of Persons with Disabilities of Uzbekistan which unites 28 organizations of persons with disabilities, multiple laws have been developed, including “On social partnership,” “On environmental control,” “On the rights of persons with disabilities.” As Uzbekistan has only recently ratified the CRPD, the national legislation does not include the concepts of “universal design” and “reasonable accommodation” enshrined in the convention. Although the legal base contains relevant rules and norms related to providing accessibility, it does not comply with the CRPD principles. For instance, SNiP promotes the segregation of children and adults with disabilities by specifying separate regulations for specialized boarding schools and residential institutions, while the Uzbek Society of Disabled People is the only public organization of persons with disabilities invited to coordinate on construction projects that will be “visited by persons with disabilities.” However, all kinds of public infrastructure should be accessible to persons with various forms of disabilities.

### Access to Education

- **Children with disabilities have nearly 20 percent less access to pre-school education** than those without disabilities, which can decrease the retention rates of children with disabilities in the upper grades.<sup>48</sup>
- **Specialized and home education of children with disabilities:** In 2020, there were 86 specialized schools and boarding schools for children with disabilities in physical or mental development. A total of 21,200 children were educated at these specialized institutions, including 6,100 who attended 21 sanatorium-type boarding schools (for children with tuberculosis and bone diseases); 13,300 children in need of long-term medical treatment were taught at home on an individual basis.<sup>49</sup> The majority of children with disabilities who are home schooled have physical and intellectual impairments, while those with sensory impairments usually study at specialized boarding schools. Based on Ministry of Public Education data from 2019, 29 percent of children with impairments of the musculoskeletal system and 28 percent of those with learning disabilities studied at home,<sup>50</sup> which exacerbates their social isolation and makes it harder for them to adapt when they are older.
- The **Inclusive Education for Children with Special Educational Needs in Uzbekistan** project was implemented in cooperation with the European Union (EU) from 2014–2016.<sup>51</sup> Within the framework of this project, pilot inclusive schools have been created in five regions; more than 150 employees of medical, psychological, and pedagogical commissions and over 1,300 teachers were trained in inclusive education services; the curricula of educational institutions for teacher training included three modules on inclusive practices; and inclusive education services were organized for over 2,000 children with special educational needs and their parents. In Tashkent, Samarkand, Namangan, Khorezm, and Surkhandarya regions, five experimental resource centers and 15 experimental schools

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Measures for Further Improvement of the System of Education and Upbringing of Children with Special Educational Needs,” No. PP-4860 from October 13, 2020. <https://lex.uz/docs/5044745>.

<sup>50</sup> Dilmurad Yusupov. 2020. “The New Law ‘On Education’ and Inclusion: How It Should Be,” *Gazeta.uz*, June 8. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/06/08/education-law/>.

<sup>51</sup> <http://inclusive-education.uz/>

were created, which attracted more than 800 children with mild forms of disability. The EU project also resulted in the adoption of a number of normative legal acts to implement inclusive education in Uzbekistan, including a Ministry of Public Education regulation.<sup>52</sup>

- Development of inclusive education:** According to GoU data, as of 2020 inclusive education systems had been introduced in 18.4 percent of general secondary educational institutions; there are plans to increase this number to 51 percent by 2025.<sup>53</sup> The government also reports that 16.5 percent of all children with special educational needs are enrolled in inclusive education in general secondary schools; 26.8 percent of children with disabilities study at specialized schools and boarding schools, while 16.8 percent study at home.<sup>54</sup> In 2020, the government approved the Concept of Development of Inclusive Education in the Public Education System in 2020–2025,<sup>55</sup> which plans to increase the share of children with disabilities studying at general secondary schools from 16.5 percent to 40.0 percent by 2025, decrease the share of children with disabilities studying at specialized educational institutions from 26.8 percent to 16 percent by 2025, and reduce the number of children schooled at home from 16.8 percent to 11.0 percent by 2025.<sup>56</sup> In the Concept for the Development of the Public Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 details the direction of the development of inclusive education in Uzbekistan, which involves improving the quality of educational services provided to children with disabilities. As an experiment, in the 2021/2022 academic year, an inclusive education system was introduced in 42 secondary schools in cities, as well as districts of Tashkent city. Based on the results of this pilot program, this inclusive approach to education will be rolled out to other regions of the republic. However, general secondary schools lack accessible buildings and toilets, reasonable accommodation (sign language interpreters, textbooks in Braille), and qualified staff (e.g., tutors for children with learning disabilities, teachers of children with hearing impairments).
- The legislative framework includes the concept of inclusive education:** A 2020 educational law<sup>57</sup> defined inclusive education for the first time in Article 20 as being “aimed at ensuring equal access to education in educational institutions for all students, taking into account the diversity of special educational needs and individual opportunities.” Yet Article 15 describes inclusive education as one form of receiving education rather than an overarching principle of inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination on the basis of disability in the educational system.
- Restricted freedom of choice of the form of education:** According to Article 55 of the new education law, the medical-psychological-pedagogical commissions (PMPKs) decide what form of education is most appropriate based on consultations with parents or other legal representatives. In practice, the PMPK commissions make these decisions based on solely medical understandings of disability.
- Access to higher education for persons with disabilities:** Starting in the 2018–2019 academic year, persons with disabilities from group I (persons who have completely lose their ability to work and require support or care) or group II (persons who have completely lost their ability to work and do not

<sup>52</sup> Order of the Minister of Public Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the procedure for transferring students with disabilities in physical or mental development from one specialized educational institution to another or to a general educational institution for training in inclusive (integrated) education,” No. 2685, June 17, 2015.

<https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/2678700?otherlang=>

<sup>53</sup> Appendix No. 3 to the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Measures for Further Improvement of the System of Education and Upbringing of Children with Special Educational Needs.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Supra* note 51.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Education” No. ZRU-637 from September 23, 2020.

<https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5013009>.

require help or care from other people) were given an additional 2 percent admission quota to the country's national universities.<sup>58</sup> The minimum score on the entrance examination was also reduced to 56.7 points (30 percent of the maximum possible score of 189 points) to ensure that persons with disabilities could access the higher education system. Applicants with disabilities who are accepted receive a scholarship from the government, but university buildings remain inaccessible and higher educational institutions do not provide reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities.<sup>59</sup> This lack of accessibility creates segregation and discrimination on the basis of disability within higher educational institutions (e.g., separate academic groups for students with disabilities), which contradicts the principles of inclusive education enshrined in the CRPD.

- **Access to vocational training for persons with disabilities:** Children with learning disabilities (e.g., autism spectrum, Down syndrome, etc.) face institutional barriers in accessing vocational or higher education due to their restricted curriculum at specialized boarding schools. Such children are inappropriately framed as “mentally retarded” or “children with delays in intellectual development,” which violates their right to vocational training on an equal basis with other children with and without disabilities. For instance, the school certificate does not allow children with learning disabilities and special needs to access vocational colleges and national universities.<sup>60</sup> Four specialized vocational colleges were founded to train persons with disabilities in the modelling and manufacturing of garments, the repair and maintenance of radio and TV equipment, the operation of a shoe-making business, accounting, audits and computer training. However, these colleges offer a limited choice of professions that might not be in demand in the labor market.
  - The Youth Affairs Agency provides free vocational courses for adults with disabilities aged 15–30 in web programming, graphic design, motion graphics, digital marketing, and social media marketing.<sup>61</sup>
  - Centres for Vocational Training were established with support from the Korean International Cooperation Agency, which provide courses in IT skills.
  - The Uzbekistan–Japan Centre for Human Development, supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency in Tashkent, provides courses for deaf and hard of hearing people in computer literacy and IT skills.<sup>62</sup>

### Access to Employment

- **Unemployment levels of persons with disabilities:** Persons with disabilities are about four times less likely to find a job than those without disabilities. In 2019, only 8.9 percent of men and 4.4 percent women with disabilities aged 16–59 and 16–54, respectively, were officially employed (7.1 percent overall).<sup>63</sup> The percentage was even lower in rural areas (5.8 percent). More than 25 percent of all

<sup>58</sup> Decree of the President of Uzbekistan “On Measures to Fundamentally Improve the System of State Support for Persons with Disabilities,” No. UP-5270 from December 1, 2017. <https://lex.uz/docs/3436196>.

<sup>59</sup> Dilmurad Yusupov. 2019a. “Uzbekistan: How to Ensure Higher Education Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities?” *CABAR.asia*, March 1. [https://cabar.asia/en/uzbekistan-how-to-ensure-higher-education-accessibility-for-people-with-disabilities#\\_ftn4](https://cabar.asia/en/uzbekistan-how-to-ensure-higher-education-accessibility-for-people-with-disabilities#_ftn4).

<sup>60</sup> Dilmurad Yusupov. 2019b. “Our Children Are Unique, Not ‘Mentally Retarded!’” *Gazeta.uz*, October 15. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/10/15/inclusive-education/>.

<sup>61</sup> The Youth Affairs Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan. 2021. “IMKON” (Opportunity) project, April 14. <https://yoshlar.gov.uz/en/project/%22imkon%22-loyihasi/>.

<sup>62</sup> The Uzbekistan – Japan Center for Human Development, January 22, 2020. <https://ujc.uz/kompyuternye-kursy/>.

<sup>63</sup> United Nations (Uzbekistan) 2019.

registered persons with disabilities (162,200 individuals) are recognized as “capable of performing certain types of work.”<sup>64</sup> Of these, roughly 6<sup>65</sup> percent (21,100) are officially employed.<sup>66</sup> Other sources claim the average is 2 percent.<sup>67</sup>

- **Institutional barriers to disability-inclusive employment:** Since “disability” is legally conflated with “illness” and an “inability to work,” many persons with disabilities experience institutional and structural barriers to entering the labor market on an equal basis with others. The biggest barrier is VTEK’s labor and professional recommendations, which may include descriptions of an individual’s disability certificate such as “unsuitable for work,” “incapable of work,” or “fit for work in specially created conditions.” Moreover, as “disability” is medicalized, non-medical rehabilitation services such as vocational and social rehabilitation and adaption services are lacking due to the failure to implement IRPs.
- **The design of the social protection system discourages persons with disabilities** from being employed in the open labor market. Access to disability benefits is limited to those who VTEK assesses as being medically “unable to work,” which excludes persons with disabilities from the labor market. Employed persons with disabilities fear losing their benefits during their regular VTEK medical assessments,<sup>68</sup> and therefore tend to work more in the informal sector. Yet the discrimination on the basis of disability is worse there, and salaries are roughly half those in the formal sector.<sup>69</sup>
- **Employment quota for persons with disabilities:** A law from 2008<sup>70</sup>—and a new law that came into force in January 2021<sup>71</sup>—obliged state institutions and private enterprises with at least 20 employees to reserve at least 3 percent of their jobs for persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations has the authority to punish companies that fail to do so, or that refuse to hire persons with disabilities,<sup>72</sup> usually by levying a fine; 10 percent of such fines is allocated to the Fund for the Support of Persons with Disabilities under the Ministry of Healthcare, which was established in 2018.<sup>73</sup> Yet this 3 percent quota is not properly enforced due to a lack of monitoring. According to information from the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, in accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan (“On measures to improve the activities of the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan”) dated December 31, 2018, the State Labor Inspectorate checks whether organizations comply with the requirements of legislation on the social protection of persons with disabilities, including job quotas. State labor inspectorates of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the regions of Uzbekistan and Tashkent city filed 105 orders and 16 applications for the failure to provide information on quotas; administrative

<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Press release, July 27, 2020. <https://t.me/mehnatvazirligi/2580>.

<sup>65</sup> National statistics data can have different number, capturing individual entrepreneurs and self-employed people with disabilities, and taking into account tax payments, that part of people with disabilities are exempted from.

<sup>66</sup> Calculation based on personal income tax data supplied by the State Tax Committee, obtained by comparing taxpayer identification numbers.

<sup>67</sup> Order of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Measures for Further Improvement of the State Support System for Disabled People,” No. P-5006 from August 1, 2017. <https://lex.uz/docs/3290919>.

<sup>68</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On State Pension Provision of Citizens.” <https://www.lex.uz/acts/112312>.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations (Uzbekistan) 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Social Protection of Disabled People in the Republic of Uzbekistan.”

<sup>71</sup> Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

<sup>72</sup> Articles 49, 50 of the Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Administrative Liability” from September 22, 1994. <https://lex.uz/docs/97661>.

<sup>73</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Fund for Supporting Persons with Disabilities under the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Uzbekistan,” No. 190 from March 9, 2018. <https://lex.uz/docs/3582410>.

sanctions were applied in 162 cases. All administrative decisions are entered into the database of internal affairs through "e-ma'muriy ish" (or electronic administrative work).

- Benefits for hiring employees with disabilities:** Uzbekistan's labor legislation discourages employers from hiring persons with disabilities.<sup>74</sup> For instance, the Labor Code<sup>75</sup> requires employers of workers with disabilities to pay them full time for working no more than 36 hours per week. Employees with disabilities have a priority right to extended annual leave of at least 30 calendar days, which can be taken after the first 6 months of employment; they must consent in writing to engage in overtime work (nights or weekends). In addition, workers with group I and II disabilities are eligible for up to 14 calendar days of unpaid leave annually. VTEK has published recommendations on part-time work, workload reduction, and other working conditions for persons with disabilities, and there are complex retirement procedures for workers with disabilities that need to be coordinated with the VTEK commissions.
- Incentives to employ persons with disabilities** include profit tax exemption for enterprises owned by persons with disabilities that employ at least 50 percent of workers with disabilities,<sup>76</sup> preferential taxation with a 4.7 percent single social (payroll) tax for workers with disabilities,<sup>77</sup> profit tax exemptions for companies for each percent in excess of the 3 percent employment quota,<sup>78</sup> and preferential treatment from the credit portfolio of the State Employment Fund. An entrepreneur with 30 percent of employees consisting of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups is also entitled to receive state benefits and preferences.<sup>79</sup> According to the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations, in accordance with the Regulation "On the procedure for the provision of subsidies and grants at the expense of the State Employment Assistance Fund of the Republic of Uzbekistan," organizations that recruited persons from socially vulnerable segments of the population (including persons with disability) in excess of the established quota are paid subsidies to reimburse the wages of each employee monthly for 12 months. In addition, subsidies (in the amount of no more than 40 basic calculation value) are allocated to enterprises to cover the costs of adapting jobs for persons with disabilities.
- Sheltered workshops for persons with sensory impairments:** The Society of the Blind and the Society of the Deaf have a system of specialized training and production enterprises (UPP) where adults with sensory impairments can be employed and receive vocational training. Moreover, subsidiaries of public associations of persons with disabilities provide a limited number of job opportunities with no guarantee of financial stability. With limited state support, these enterprises have become uncompetitive during the transition to a market economy.

<sup>74</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2019. *Situation Analysis on Children and Adults with Disabilities in Uzbekistan*.

<https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/3571/file/Brief%20PwD%20SitAn.pdf>.

<sup>75</sup> Labor Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan from December 21, 1995. <https://lex.uz/docs/145261>.

<sup>76</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Additional Measures of State Support of Public Associations of Disabled People" No. PP-4423 from August 23, 2019. <https://lex.uz/docs/4485129>.

<sup>77</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Organizational Measures to Stimulate Provision of Employment of Socially Vulnerable Layers of Population," No. PP-3782 from June 11, 2018. <https://lex.uz/docs/3778019>.

<sup>78</sup> Article 337 of the Tax Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan from December 30, 2019. <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4674893>.

<sup>79</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Organizational Measures to Stimulate Provision of Employment of Socially Vulnerable Layers of Population," No. PP-3782 from June 11, 2018.

## Social Protection

- Right to an adequate standard of living and social protection:** Social protection measures for persons with disabilities include disability allowances, concessions, and social services. Persons with disabilities and their families report that the disability allowances are inadequate and do not take into account the severity of impairments and the associated extra costs.<sup>80</sup> The child disability benefit is for children with disabilities under 16 and HIV-infected people under the age of 18; as of 2020 it amounted to Som 513,350 (less than \$50) per month. This scheme covers only 52 percent of children with severe disabilities, and many families struggle to get access.<sup>81</sup> Based on administrative data of the 484,000 registered persons with disabilities receiving one of three main disability benefits, 66 percent receive the contributory social insurance Disability Pension, 30 percent receive the Disability Allowance for those who have been recognized as having a disability since childhood, and only 4 percent have access to the Disability Social Pension that is provided to those who acquired a disability in adulthood but are not contributing to the Pension Fund.<sup>82</sup> An old-age benefit is awarded to mothers if their children have (had) congenital impairments and they lack work experience once they reach the age of 50.<sup>83</sup>
- The disability benefit is designed to provide basic income security** in case of a constant or long-term loss of the capacity to work. Persons with group I and II disabilities who work or have other sources of livelihood (except for receiving alimony or scholarships) are not entitled to receive disability benefits. As disability is conflated with impairments and an associated lack of capacity to work, the examiners who determine eligibility for benefits often assume that persons with disabilities are unemployable. Thus, the benefits become incompatible with work. Disability benefits are granted for the entire period of incapacity—either short term (with the need for periodic reexamination) or permanent (for chronic conditions).
- Benefits and concessions:** Persons with disabilities have preferential access to free prosthetic and orthopedic products, technical means of rehabilitation, and wheelchairs. They can also receive discounts for purchasing a house, free public transport (those in disability group I, blind and those accompanying them, etc.).
- Mainstream social protection schemes:** Uzbekistan’s mainstream benefits include a system of benefits for children, youth, and older people. Mainstream child benefits include two main schemes: (1) the Childcare Allowance for families with a child under the age of 2 and (2) the Family Allowance for families with children aged 2–14. Currently only 17 percent of eligible children are able to access child benefits.<sup>84</sup> Poor households can apply for the Low-Income Allowance through mahalla committees, but the scheme covers only 61,000 families out of a population of more than 33 million.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>80</sup> United Nations (Uzbekistan) 2019.

<sup>81</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan, “Building a National Social Protection System Fit for Uzbekistan’s Children and Young People,” May 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/reports/building-national-social-protection-system-fit-uzbekistans-children-and-youth>

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the State Program for the Implementation of the Strategy of Action for the Priority Directions of the Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017–2021 in the Year of Active Investments and Social Development,” from January 17, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan. 2020. “Building a National Social Protection System Fit for Uzbekistan’s Children and Young People.” <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/reports/building-national-social-protection-system-fit-uzbekistans-children-and-youth>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

To be eligible for child and low-income benefits, each household member must live on less than 1.5 times the value of the minimum wage; mahalla staff is responsible for selecting recipients. Young people can access public works programs and unemployment benefits, but the coverage is again very low. Women over 55 and men over 60 can receive an old-age pension.

- Exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream schemes:** Until recently, children and adults with disabilities could not benefit from the mainstream social protection schemes, since they were thought to be protected by disability benefits. Families with children with disabilities were not usually eligible for child and low-income benefits, as the disability benefits disqualified the household from applying for the scheme and they did not meet the unrealistic national poverty threshold. Moreover, working-age persons with disabilities may find it hard to compete with young people without disabilities to access public works programs that are mainly designed for the latter. Finally, upon reaching pension age, persons with disabilities must choose between a disability pension and an old-age pension, as they cannot receive both. As of May 20, 2020, when calculating average monthly total income to determine the household's eligibility for social protection schemes, this does not include disability benefits received by family members, pensions, or benefits for the loss of a breadwinner, benefits for disability from childhood to persons over 16 years old, benefits for children with disabilities under 16 or HIV-infected people under 18 years of age, or lump-sum benefits for childbirth or burial paid through the Pension Fund.<sup>86</sup>
- Lack of professional social services:** There is a lack of professional social services and case-managed support for persons with disabilities at the community level. The country's social services are fragmented, and inadequate communication between various ministries and departments compromises their effectiveness and efficiency.<sup>87</sup> Starting from academic year 2021–2022, the staff of local self-government bodies (mahalla committees) can study social work (in various fields of activity) at higher educational institutions. The National University of Uzbekistan is the leading institution for the development of educational and methodological literature on qualification requirements, curricula, subjects, and other training programs.<sup>88</sup>
- Low coverage and barriers to access:** Only 46 percent of children and working-age adults with severe forms of impairment are able to access disability benefits; there are no gender-based differences in access.<sup>89</sup> The main barriers include a lack of knowledge about disability-specific benefits, additional costs incurred during the process of applying for benefits, and red tape and non-transparency in disability assessment. The disability benefits do not cover the minimum standard of living or additional disability-related costs. Uzbekistan has not legally determined a minimum subsistence level and consumer basket, although Article 39 of the constitution stipulates that “pensions, allowances and other kinds of welfare may not be lower than the officially fixed minimum subsistence wage.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, the disability benefits do not help ensure basic income security and are not sufficient to cover health care and disability-related costs. Thus, these benefits have no hope of promoting the

<sup>86</sup> “The Procedures for Obtaining Social Benefits in Mahallas is Simplified,” Norma.uz, May 25, 2020.

[https://www.norma.uz/novoe\\_v\\_zakonodatelstve/uprostili\\_poryadok\\_polucheniya\\_socposobiy\\_v\\_mahallyah](https://www.norma.uz/novoe_v_zakonodatelstve/uprostili_poryadok_polucheniya_socposobiy_v_mahallyah).

<sup>87</sup> The Investigative Team of the Columbia School of Social Work, Social Intervention Group. 2018. Final Report “The Social Services Workforce (SSW) in Uzbekistan: Strengths, Challenges, and Ways Forward.”

[https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/3366/file/Report%20on%20Assessment%20of%20SSW%20UZ\\_2018\\_eng.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/3366/file/Report%20on%20Assessment%20of%20SSW%20UZ_2018_eng.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Measures to Improve the Training System for Citizens' Self-Government Bodies,” No. 3 from January 8, 2021. <https://static.norma.uz/documents/2/mahalla.pdf>.

<sup>89</sup> UNICEF Uzbekistan 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. <https://constitution.uz/en>.

socio-economic inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities and their families during their lifetimes.

- **Purely medical approach to disability assessment and determination:** One of the main challenges of Uzbekistan’s disability-specific social protection schemes is that the disability assessments are increasingly focused on a purely medical examination of physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental impairments. The process does not take into account the attitudinal and environmental barriers highlighted in the CRPD. Assessment bodies comprise only “medical experts” and do not include representatives of local disabled people’s organizations. Disability assessments are usually conducted in city centers in buildings that are not fully accessible to persons with mobility impairments, and no sign-language interpretation is provided.<sup>91</sup> Finally, red tape, bureaucracy, and non-transparency in the disability assessment and determination process exclude many who are eligible for benefits, which results in underreported administrative data on disability.

## Sport

Uzbekistan has a long-standing tradition of supporting the Paralympics. The Paralympic movement goes back to the end of the 1990s, and the National Paralympic team has regularly competed in the Summer Paralympics since Athens in 2004. In 2012 (London), Sharif Khalilov won Uzbekistan’s first medal (in judo). However, the country’s most successful result was in 2016 (Rio de Janeiro) with 31 medals. In 2021 (Tokyo), the country won 19 medals. Recently, a presidential resolution, "On additional measures for the development of the Paralympic movement," established the National Paralympic Committee of Uzbekistan and its regional branches.

## Impact of COVID-19

- **The COVID-19 pandemic and strict quarantine measures introduced by the government** disproportionately affected children and adults with disabilities and their families in Uzbekistan. Persons with disabilities were at greater risk of contracting the coronavirus due to physical barriers to accessing hygiene facilities, increased contact (e.g., with assistive devices, social workers, etc.), challenges in social distancing due to the need for external social support, as well as difficulties accessing information. Persons with severe and multiple disabilities (e.g., persons who are deafblind, children with learning disabilities) and girls and women with disabilities have been at the highest risk. Although the government tried to provide information about the spread of COVID-19 and precautionary measures in accessible formats, persons with learning disabilities were left behind as easy-to-read formats were not available.
- **Secondary impacts of the quarantine measures:** After the government introduced strict restrictions on movement, the sheltered workshops conducted by the Society of the Blind and the Society of the Deaf shut down, and workers with sensory impairments who were engaged in manual labor in these enterprises lost their jobs and income. The lockdown severely affected persons with disabilities who worked in the informal labor market (e.g., deaf and hard-of-hearing parking attendants in Tashkent).
- **The L2CU survey** conducted by the World Bank identified community-level COVID-19 impact risks for persons with disabilities, including reduced access to specialized health, rehabilitation, and social services during lockdowns, and raised concerns regarding the accessibility of information about

<sup>91</sup> Gazeta.uz. 2019. “Inaccessible commissions,” September 7. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/09/07/accessibility/>.

COVID-19 for children and adults with disabilities.<sup>92</sup> Many persons with disabilities struggled to access markets during the strict quarantine.<sup>93</sup> Persons with disabilities and women reported worsened mental health during the lockdown: from July to December 2020, an average of 51 percent of persons with disabilities evaluated their mental health as “fair” or “poor”; the peak was in August 2020, at 61 percent.<sup>94</sup> Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of mahalla leaders surveyed mentioned the increased needs of persons with disabilities during the pandemic.<sup>95</sup>

- **Government support for persons with disabilities during the pandemic:** The Center for the Coordination of Sponsorship Assistance under the Ministry of Mahalla and Family Support was established in April 2020 to coordinate the activities of volunteers and distribute basic goods to vulnerable members of the public, including persons with disabilities. A telephone hotline was created, but it was inaccessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing people. The government also introduced “iron notebooks” (*temir daftar*)—lists of five types of vulnerable groups in need of social protection: families with persons with disabilities and chronically ill family members; families consisting of lonely elderly people, widows, low-income people, and people in need of care; families with five or more children; citizens who have lost their jobs and sources of income as a result of quarantine measures, including returned migrants; and families below the poverty line in need of help and financial support.<sup>96</sup>
- **Uzbekistan’s COVID-19 vaccination roll-out** began on April 1, 2021, but there are concerns about how persons with disabilities will access it.

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<sup>92</sup> William Seitz et al. ND. *Uzbekistan: Identifying Community-Level COVID-19 Impact Risks*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34925/Uzbekistan-Dynamically-Identifying-Community-Level-COVID-19-Impact-Risks.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> William Seitz. 2021. *Crisis and Recovery in Uzbekistan: Economic and Social Impacts of COVID-19*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/a141cb6bace3f340df173e75d4463970-0080062021/original/L2CU-COVID-19-Rev2020-Cleared-UZB.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Gazeta.uz*. 2020. “On Social Support during the Pandemic,” August 14. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/08/14/social-support/>.

### Legal and Policy Frameworks

- **International**
  - Uzbekistan signed the CRPD in 2009<sup>97</sup> and ratified it in 2021<sup>98</sup> with a statement that recognizes that persons with disabilities have a “**legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of their life.**”<sup>99</sup> Yet it included a reservation which implies that the GoU is not yet ready to offer persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities the legal capacity to, for example, independently file claims in court.<sup>100</sup>
- **Regional**
  - Uzbekistan adopted the [Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific](#), which launched the new Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022.
  - President Mirziyoyev proposed establishing a Regional Council for the self-realization of persons with disabilities.<sup>101</sup>
- **National**
  - A **December 2017 presidential decree**<sup>102</sup> specified proposals to improve the quality and standard of living of persons with disabilities; to provide them with medical and social assistance; to assist in their realization of rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests; and to play an active role in society. It was based on a comprehensive study conducted together with disabled people’s organizations (DPOs) that identified a number of systemic shortcomings and problems.
  - The **October 2020 Law** provides the following basic principles for ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities:
    - Respect for the dignity of persons with disabilities, their independence, and freedom of choice
    - Non-admission of discrimination on the basis of disability
    - Equality of opportunities in the implementation of human rights and freedoms
    - Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and their right to maintain their identity
    - Availability of facilities and services
    - Involvement of persons with disabilities in the life of society and the state

The law introduces a new term—“discrimination on the basis of disability”—which refers to any isolation, exclusion, or restriction due to disability, the purpose or result of which is to

<sup>97</sup> UN RPD Chapter IV. [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtmsg\\_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtmsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=en).

<sup>98</sup> After Parliament adopted a bill to ratify the convention, President Mirziyoyev signed it into law. *Xalq So’zi*. 2021. “On Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (New York, December 13, 2006),” June 8. <https://xs.uz/ru/post/o-ratifikatsii-konventsii-o-pravakh-invalidov-nyu-jork-13-dekabrya-2006-goda>; Senate of the Republic of Uzbekistan. “The Senate has Ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.” <https://senat.uz/ru/lists/view/2946>; Press release of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Uzbekistan from May 18, 2021. <https://t.me/qonunchilikpalatasi/4388>.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Based on a comment by the disability rights lawyer and activist Oybek Isakov, chairperson of the Association of Disabled People of Uzbekistan, June 8, 2021. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/06/08/convention/>.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Measures for Cardinal Improvement of the State Support System for Persons with Disabilities,” No. UP-5270, December 1, 2017. <https://lex.uz/docs/3436196>.

- deny recognition or realization on an equal basis with others of the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities in political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or other areas.
- A **January 2021 law**<sup>103</sup> introduced the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of disability and supersedes the previous law.<sup>104</sup> Its implementation mechanism remains unclear given the inaccessibility of courts and legal actions due to disability discrimination. The new law still conflates disability with impairments via a medical model of disability, and therefore violates the CRPD provision that defines disability as “an evolving concept...[that]... results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”<sup>105</sup>

### World Bank Engagement in the Country

- **The Environmental and Social Framework (ESF)**, which came into effect in October 2018, requires borrowers to take into account the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people/groups. Stakeholder Engagement Plans, Resettlement Policy Frameworks, Environmental and Social Management Frameworks, and other ESF documents developed for projects must include language that strengthens the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Two current projects in Uzbekistan target disabled inclusion. The **Early Childhood Development Project** finances (1) the development, implementation, and evaluation of a home-visiting special needs education program focused on children aged 3–6 and (2) technical assistance to review or develop regulations to promote inclusive preschool education for children with disabilities or special educational needs. The **Modernizing Higher Education Project** finances technical assistance to conduct a survey on the barriers to higher education for socially vulnerable groups.
- **The Strengthening the Social Protection System Project** (2019-2024) seeks to enhance the capacity of job counselors at Employment Support Centers to conduct effective and sustainable job placement, with special attention to disadvantaged groups (women, youth, persons with disabilities, the poorest 40 percent of the population, and those with low skills or obsolete skills hit by economic restructuring and in danger of becoming poor). This support will include developing a methodology for individualized case management and effective profiling tools with a focus on vulnerable jobseekers including persons with disabilities. The project also provides wage subsidies for employers who hire socially vulnerable jobseekers above the quota.
- **The Rural Infrastructure Development Project** (2020 to 2024) entails ongoing operations that improve access to basic infrastructure in over 300 remote rural villages through participatory community mobilization activities. It is based on the principles of community-driven decision-making, inclusion of the poor and vulnerable within communities, supporting gender equity, and strengthening transparency and accountability. The project ensures the participation and inclusion of all neighborhoods and all marginalized and vulnerable people in the community—including widows, persons with disabilities and older people—in community mobilization processes and

<sup>103</sup> The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

<sup>104</sup> The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Social Protection of Disabled People in the Republic of Uzbekistan.”

<sup>105</sup> Preamble, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/preamble.html>.

conducts specific outreach meetings for young women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable village members to participate and give voice in community development planning process.

- **The Medium-Size Cities Integrated Urban Development Project** (2019 to 2027) supports the GoU in improving selected urban infrastructure, public spaces and assets, and access to services in participating cities. The project strives to make urban environments, infrastructure, and housing as inclusive and accessible as possible to persons with disabilities in alignment with the World Bank’s [Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework](#). The project promotes and addresses issues related to physical accessibility, which means supporting a universal design approach to project-financed infrastructure investments to facilitate equal access to public spaces, buildings, and facilities for people with limited mobility, including persons with disabilities and older people. One of the project’s results framework indicators is “Square kilometers of new or rehabilitated urban public spaces, of which now accessible to persons with disabilities” to track progress in improving the accessibility of urban places to persons with disabilities.

## Key Partners

### *Core Ministries, Departments, and Agencies*

**Agency for the Development of Medical and Social Services** provides medical and social services to older persons, persons with disabilities, and others in need of social protection. It is subordinate and accountable to the Cabinet of Ministers. The agency is responsible for the boarding school “Sakhovat” and “Muruvvat”; the National Center for Rehabilitation and Prosthetics of Persons with Disabilities; regional rehabilitation centers for persons with disabilities; sanatoriums and boarding houses for war and labor veterans; the Republican Inspectorate of Medical and Social Expertise and its territorial divisions; the off-budget foundation for the support of boarding schools “Muruvvat” and “Sakhovat”; and the Foundation for the Support of Persons with Disabilities under the Ministry of Healthcare.

The **Ministry of Healthcare** provides medical aid and support for the prevention of illnesses for persons with disabilities; organizes rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities; creates rehabilitation, medical, and diagnostic centers; and trains specialists for medical and preventative services.

The **Inter-Agency Council on the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities** coordinates the activities of bodies implementing state policy in the field of ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as local self-government bodies; participates in the implementation of state programs for rehabilitation, social protection, and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities; provides assistance in the education, vocational training, retraining, advanced training, and employment of persons with disabilities; and helps create favorable conditions for the full participation of persons with disabilities in society and the state. As of May 2021, the council’s 16 members included only one DPO—the Uzbek Society of Disabled People, which mainly represents adults with physical impairments. The other members are heads and deputy heads of ministries and government agencies.<sup>106</sup>

The **Ministry of Public Education** is responsible for the development of inclusive education and the transformation from institutionalized care to family-based care. In 2020, it established an “Inclusive Education Laboratory” at the Republican Center for Vocational Guidance and Psychological and Pedagogical Diagnostics of Students, which is responsible for creating the conditions for inclusive education in general secondary schools, developing criteria to determine the quality and effectiveness of inclusive education, and monitoring its implementation across the country.<sup>107</sup>

The **Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations** is responsible for providing employment support to persons with disabilities. It established district-level Employment Assistance Centers, where persons with disabilities can access job referrals, free consultations, and free professional training or retraining. The ministry also has a national database of vacancies <http://ish.mehnat.uz/>; the section on quota-based jobs for persons with disabilities was still in development as of June 2021.

The **Ministry for the Support of Family and Mahalla** is responsible for providing social, legal, psychological, and material assistance to women in need of help and in difficult social situations, including

<sup>106</sup> *Gazeta.uz*. 2021. “Council About Us Without Us,” May 27. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/05/27/council/>.

<sup>107</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “On Measures for Further Improvement of the System of Education and Upbringing of Children with Special Educational Needs,” No. PP-4860, October 13, 2020. <https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/5044745>.

those with disabilities. The ministry's Public Fund for the Support of Women and the Family allocates money to provide women and children with disabilities with assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs, hearing aids) and surgeries. It also coordinates the activities of self-governing bodies (mahalla committees).

### Disabled People's Organizations

Uzbekistan's active disability movement is largely concentrated in the capital city, Tashkent. The Ministry of Justice reports that there are 613 NGOs protecting the rights and legitimate interests of persons with disabilities, but this number includes the regional, city, and district branches of NGOs. According to unconfirmed sources, more than 70 NGOs are working to protect disability rights and inclusive development in Uzbekistan, including:

- **Association of Disabled People of Uzbekistan:** an umbrella cross-disability DPO that unites the efforts of 30 organizations and has 11 regional branches across the country. Its main goal is to coordinate the actions of public organizations of persons with disabilities to ensure their rights and create an inclusive society by implementing the CRPD. It regularly conducts public oversight over the implementation of the requirements of national legislation in the field of protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and actively participates in the legislative process.
- **Uzbek Society of Disabled People:** established just before the breakup of the Soviet Union<sup>108</sup> to unite mainly persons with physical impairments. It has more than 170 branches across the country and over 200,000 members. Its core activities include the social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, helping them access education, and creating equal opportunities to exercise their rights. The society has its own newspaper, *Kadriyat* (Dignity).
- **Society of the Blind of Uzbekistan:** established in 1932 by a group of persons with visual impairments to protect their rights and interests and provide social support, rehabilitation, social integration, and assistance to ensure equal opportunities. It currently unites more than 23,000 persons with visual impairments across the country. The society's Central Board operates about 45 specialized UPPs—sheltered workshops for persons with physical impairments who are usually employed in manual labor to produce a limited set of goods (e.g., mattresses, car covers, textiles, cotton wool, industrial brushes, etc.).<sup>109</sup>
- **Society of the Deaf of Uzbekistan:** established in 1929 to involve the deaf and hard of hearing in socially useful activities, protect their rights, and advance their economic, social, and cultural interests. It currently has about 13 branches across the country and 22,000 registered members (45 percent of the number of registered citizens with hearing and speech impairments over 16 years of age). There are 12 UPPs for deaf and hard-of-hearing people, 12 branches, 75 primary organizations, and 2 centers of cultural development. The society's enterprises engage in sewing, woodworking, household chemicals, repair and construction work.
- **Kibray district Society of Women with Disabilities "Opa-singillar":** provides support for women with disabilities and mothers with children who have special needs who find themselves in difficult life situations. This support includes the provision of social and legal information, support in obtaining education, in employment, and the provision of targeted material assistance to those in need.

<sup>108</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers under the President of the Uzbek SSR No. 18 of January 22, 1991.

<sup>109</sup> Training and production enterprises of the Society of the Blind of Uzbekistan. <https://uzkoimb.uz/ru/node/75>.

- **Youth social and legal rehabilitation center for disabled people “Millennium” in Tashkent:** supports young persons with disabilities by promoting independent skills and improving their quality of life.
- **NGO “Ishonch va Hayot”:** a platform for persons with HIV/tuberculosis/hepatitis and populations with an increased risk of contracting them. It seeks to provide comprehensive support for people living with these diseases to improve the quality and dignity of their lives, fight stigma and discrimination, and stem the tide of the country’s epidemic.
- **Public Association of Disabled People of Tashkent city “Sharoit Plus”:** a self-help group of persons with disabilities and those who want to help them create an inclusive society. It was created in 2009 and officially registered as an NGO in 2016. It delivers Disability Equality Trainings (DET),<sup>110</sup> peer counselling support (individual psychological assistance), and training in independent thinking skills for persons with disabilities. In 2021, Sharoit Plus launched an inclusive recruitment web portal for persons with disabilities in Tashkent city ([www.ishplus.uz](http://www.ishplus.uz)) to support disability-inclusive employment in Uzbekistan.

#### NGOs/Civil Society Organizations

- **The Republican Centre for Social Adaptation of Children** was established in 2004 to provide comprehensive medical, social, psychological, and pedagogical assistance and advice as well as legal assistance to children of socially vulnerable groups (including those with disabilities, severe chronic diseases, and minors in specialized educational institutions).
- The **Center for Youth and Children with Disabilities under the Youth Union of Uzbekistan (Mehrlı Qo’llar)** was established in December 2017 to protect the interests of youth with disabilities—blind, hearing impaired, and those with learning disabilities—to create equal opportunities in society, provide legal, psychological, and pedagogical assistance, and engage in charitable activities. The center’s online charity platform, “Mehrlı Qo’llar,” raises funds through social networks for children and youth with disabilities and their families.
- **Republican NGO “Avlod Baraka”:** A comprehensive system of interdepartmental support for children and adolescents with developmental disabilities (including autism spectrum disorder).
- **Samarkand Regional Center for Persons with Disabilities “Hayot”** focuses on the adaptation and socialization of persons with special needs, informs the population about the problems of persons with special needs, and employs persons with special needs.
- **Special Olympics Uzbekistan:** provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and share their gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes, and the community.
- **“Sanvikt” Art Center for Children with Disabilities** was founded in 1999 to identify and develop artistic talent in children with special needs. The center teaches in a variety of artistic media, and assists in psychological rehabilitation through creative self-expression, admission to specialized educational institutions, and support with tuition fees through sponsorship and patrons.
- **Support Center for Children with Disabilities and their Parents “Umidvorlik”** provides social support to children, adolescents, and young persons with various types of impairments and their parents through educational, awareness-raising, and other development and socialization programs. The NGO

<sup>110</sup> <http://detforum.com/det-forum-uzbekistan/>.

organizes, for example, free “Skillful hands” classes and workshops, the “Music Salon” program of speech therapy rhythmic for children with speech impairments, and a carpentry craft workshop for adolescents and young persons with intellectual and mental disabilities. Its members currently include about 100 families raising children, adolescents, and young people with various types of disabilities.

### Development Partners

- **The UN Joint Program on Social Protection** (January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021) aims to help the GoU build and deliver a high-quality social protection system that offers all citizens—particularly those at risk of being left behind—income security and social support throughout their lives jointly with the government and civil society. By introducing the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) in the assessment of disability and moving away from the medical approach, the program will enable greater access for persons with disabilities to social protection and promote their full inclusion in various aspects of social life.
- In 2020, the UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) in Uzbekistan, in the framework of the UN Joint Program on Social Protection, initiated a pilot to apply international norms in disability assessment and determination procedures. The pilot included training on understanding and mastering the fundamental principles and notions of the Health and Disability ICF and the CRPD for 25 Medical-Labor Expertise Commission members.
- **UNICEF Uzbekistan** implemented a Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRD) program (April to July 2021) titled “Inception Phase for Social Services Delivery Transformation: Implementing Human Rights-Based Approach for Children, Youth and Women with Disabilities in Uzbekistan.” It coordinates implementation jointly with the GoU UNDP, UNFPA, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and others. The program includes a) an induction workshop, b) situational analysis, and c) the development of a full proposal to UNPRD.

### Glossary—Empower with Words

- Language to describe various disabilities varies across countries and cultures. It is useful to ask persons with disabilities in the country context about their preferences. It is also important to find out whether an individual is willing to disclose their impairment. When describing an individual, do not reference his or her disability unless it is clearly pertinent to the issue or story.
- It is recommended to use person-first language that puts the person before his or her impairment (a person who uses a wheelchair, a person with visual impairment), which is in line with the CRPD.
- The use of terms such as “handicapped,” “a person suffering from...,” “mentally retarded,” “able-bodied/normal,” “the disabled,” “the blind,” “paraplegic,” “wheelchair bound” are not recommended. Disability is not an illness; hence it is important to refrain from using terms such as healthy versus sick.
- The Disability Advisor can provide a more detailed glossary of terms on request ([McClain-Nhlapo cmclain-nhlapo@worldbank.org](mailto:cmclain-nhlapo@worldbank.org)).

**The following brief glossary provides guidelines for portraying individuals with disabilities in a respectful and balanced way by using neutral language**

Person(s)/people with disabilities
Person who is blind/person with visual impairment(s)
Person who is deaf/ person who is deaf or hard of hearing/ person with hearing impairment: Many people in the Deaf community prefer the use of a lowercase “d” to refer to audiological status and the use of a capital “D” when referring to the culture and community of Deaf people.
Person who is deafblind
Person(s)/people with disabilities
Person who is blind/person with visual impairment(s)
Person with mobility/physical impairment(s)
Person using a wheelchair/a wheelchair user
Person with intellectual/developmental impairment(s)
Person with albinism
Person with short stature or little person
Person with a mental health problem
Person with Down syndrome
Disabled People’s Organizations (DPO) or Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD)
Assistive devices (white cane, hearing aid, wheelchair, tricycle)