

2020

MILESTONES

2020

Strategic pathway

Efforts to Develop National Strategy on Social Protection

The national Action Strategy 2017-2021 marks the strengthening of social protection system as one of the key priorities aimed at ensuring mandatory social guarantees, improving social support to the vulnerable population, improving social services and developing public-private partnership in providing social services to the population. The development of the national strategy on social protection is part of the 2020 Annual State programme.

The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan jointly with the United Nations Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection (UN Joint Programme) developed the Concept of the National Strategy on Social Protection (NSSP). Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Public Education, Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ministry of Makhalla and Family Support, Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction, Pension Fund, General Prosecutor's Office, social partners, International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and other international organisations took part in the discussion on the developed Concept.

After the discussions, the Concept of NSSP was also published online to collect public opinion. Currently the Concept is submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for further approval.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance and ILO, one of the UN Joint Programme implementing agencies, form thematic working groups to develop the Strategy itself. There will be four groups responsible for the following pillars of social protection: social assistance; social services; social insurance and pensions; active labour market programs.

Each group will work on financing, institutional reform, gender equality, monitoring and evaluation, and data related issues. They will lead the NSSP drafting process and sectoral policies in line with the Government priorities, Sustainable Development Goals and Social Protection Floors.

A Shift to Social Model of Disability in Social Protection


Globally, disability is no longer perceived as purely a medical phenomenon. International Classification of Functioning, Health, and Disability (ICF) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) define disability as a temporary stage of life which should be assessed considering not only physical aspects but also including environmental factors of disability assessment.

In this regard, Uzbekistan also shares similar views and shows a political will to move from medical approach to social model in defining and assessing disability. In collaboration with UN Agencies, in the framework of the UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection, the country is initiating a process of introducing international norms in disability assessment and determination procedures. To achieve this goal, in August-September of 2020, UNDP, as a part of the UN Joint Programme, conducted a series of online practical training for 25 Medical-Labour Expertise Commission (MLEC) members on understanding the fundamental principles and notions of the ICF and the CRPD. By the end of the trainings, the MLEC members got better understanding and skills in mastering the ICF and CRPD principles for smooth transformation from medical to social approach in defining and assessing disability, including use of a broader definition of disability that incorporates an assessment of the social and physical environment.

UN Joint Programme Reported on its Key Achievements and Plans for 2021

On 27 November, UNICEF, ILO and UNDP presented the progress, achievements and future plans of the Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection in Uzbekistan, implemented with the Government.

Co-chaired by the Deputy Minister of Finance and UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan, the Annual Reporting and Donors Meeting hosted over 40 participants from the relevant government ministries, national stake-holders, including the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, Confederation of Employees of Uzbekistan, Association of the Disabled People of Uzbekistan, as well as international donor organizations and the UN agencies. "The people of Uzbekistan, like billions of people around the world, faced a number of challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government has made significant successful attempts to mitigate the consequences of the crisis. Together with the international community, we seek to build a social protection system which will be resilient to the pandemic and other disasters, and support people in any circumstances. The UN Joint Programme is one of such tools we are using on our way." – Mr. Jamshid Abueva, Deputy Minister of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan.



UN Joint Programme Established Close Cooperation with the Parliament

On 5 December, the UN Joint Programme held a round-table meeting in close collaboration with the Senate and the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the civil society organizations. The consultations focused on the strengths, challenges faced by the national social protection system and the role of the Oliy Majlis in supporting strengthening of the social protection in Uzbekistan.

The event gathered together over 30 representatives of the Oliy Majlis, Association of Disabled People of Uzbekistan, the "Yuksalish" Nationwide Movement, Development Strategy Center, national think-tanks and the UN agencies. Participants discussed the progress in the field of the social protection system reform, as well as the challenges faced by the system.

"Today we pay special attention to ensuring social protection of the population, which is considered to be one of the key goals of sustainable development. A key role is given to ensuring employment opportunities to the population, especially to women and youth. We believe that the UN Joint Programme on strengthening social protection in Uzbekistan will keep on contributing to effective efforts toward achieving the goals." - highlighted Ms. Tanzila Narbaeva, the Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

"UN Joint Programme supported by the Global Sustainable Development Fund for Social Protection harnesses the expertise of UNICEF, ILO and UNDP to assist the Government of Uzbekistan in developing the National strategy on social protection, designing an effective legislative, institutional and monitoring mechanism for coordination and delivery of social protection, and significantly improving social protection of people with disabilities, this accelerating progress towards Sustainable



Stories and Faces

Single Registry Makes It Easier to Access Social Benefits

Low-income families in Syrdarya Region, like Dildora's, used to go through time-and-effort consuming procedures in order to apply for child allowance

It used to be a common practice for a Mahalla Commission, made up of 15 respected community members, to hear applicants' descriptions of their poverty, then vote on them. Applicants also had to knock on dozens of government agency doors to collect the necessary papers and wait in long lines to prove that the family were not making ends meet. Then representatives would inspect their houses to make sure they were not hiding any income.

Dildora Abiyatova, a young mother from the region, shared: "They needed a certificate of marital status, a copy of the land registry, a certificate of employment, then a family savings account, and then a certificate from three neighbours that stated whether we were working or not."

Now, thanks to a Single Registry scheme that has been piloted in the region, all the breadwinners are finding it easier to be paid the social

benefits their families are due. The Single Registry for social protection operates independently, receiving all the necessary information from nine agencies. This information determines whether the citizen is eligible for financial assistance or not.

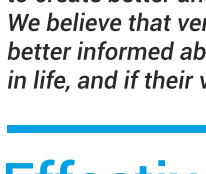
"Everything has changed," says Dildora, a smile of relief on her face. "It's easy, because only a birth certificate, passport copy, and marriage certificate are required. Now there's no need to run around different offices."

Now, families applying for child allowances do not have to go through commissions. They submit their documents to the off-budgetary pension fund. The fund inserts the documents into automated system which provides quick response. The applicants receive the response by SMS and get their allowances on the 15th day of each month.

The Single Registry is rolling out to Uzbekistan. It has covered 9 regions already.



Photo: @UNICEF/Nematov



Voices to Support People with Disabilities

Life of persons with disabilities is full of daily challenges to overcome. Establishment of a good two-way communication means for persons with disabilities is an important tool to create better and friendly social climate and environment. We believe that very much can be accomplished if society is better informed about difficulties people with disabilities face in life, and if their voices and concerns are heard.

In November, UNDP, under the Joint Programme framework, launched a series of radio programmes called "One of Us" broadcasted by Radio Maxima. It is broadcasted twice a week in Uzbek and Russian and offers an avenue for PWDs to let their voices be heard.

The radio programme is dedicated to social protection of PWDs and their inclusion in different aspects of public life. It is built around the discussion between a presenter and interviewee, and includes brief information on best practices and life hacks for PWDs. The programme interviews NGOs working to promote disability rights, the disabled persons and officials. It aims to expose gaps and obstacles towards the path to inclusive and accessible environment in Uzbekistan and discuss ways to overcome them.

The programme seeks to sensitize the general public to disability and solicit their understanding and support to enable PWDs to play active role in public life, as well as to inform the latter of their rights, available opportunities and services.

Effective Social Insurance System for All Families

Murod is one among an estimated 50-60 % of the Uzbek population of working age working in the informal economy¹ with earnings that are not enough to contribute towards social insurance in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, family needs, medical services, poverty, and old age. Nodira, who is an agricultural worker, is in the same situation.

As the family grew, they decided to apply to the mahalla – the local self-governing community, for

financial support. Three months later, Nodira and Murod received an allowance for families with children aged 2 to 14 years. But there was a catch – the mahalla committee does not have enough funds for social assistance for all people living in poverty and has to rotate families who apply for support on a six-monthly basis.

"This young family was lucky to get support from the state social assistance programme delivered through mahalla, because one third of estimated 12% people living in poverty are unable to access it," says Jasmina Papa, Social Protection Specialist at the ILO Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. "The amount and duration of the benefit are different questions; recent research showed that the child and family low-income benefits – despite being targeted to those living in poverty – contribute to a reduction in poverty of only 8%."²

Murod has applied to the national employment centre, hoping to find a job with a formal contract, which would enroll him into social insurance with access to

unemployment benefit, medical care, sickness benefits, and old age pension.

The social insurance system in Uzbekistan does not enshrine all nine internationally agreed guarantees: medical care, sickness leave/benefit, support during unemployment, security in old age, compensation for employment injury, support to cover costs associated with bringing up children, maternity rights, invalidity rights, and support for survivors in case of loss of breadwinner. However, if Murod could secure formal employment, he would have access to unemployment benefit, medical care, sickness benefits, and old age pension.

The UN Joint Programme on Strengthening Social Protection lays the basis for a major reform of the national social protection system, between 2020 and 2030. The Programme works closely with Government in the establishment of the social protection entity, modeling integrated social protection for children, the National Strategy of Social Protection, the pilot initiatives for persons with disabilities and the disability assessment mechanism.




Photo: @ILO

¹ Republican Scientific Center for Employment and Labor Protection under the MELR, 2018 (<http://centr-truda.uz/en/home/> or <https://mehnat.uz/ru/subordinate-organizations/structure/242>). The main purpose of the survey was to determine the number of people employed in the informal sector of the economy and the unemployed. This sociological survey was conducted in 62 districts and cities of the Republic of

Karakalpakstan and Tashkent city. The sample size was 16,425 citizens in 3,100 households in 310 citizen self-governing bodies (mahallas).

² The Listening to Citizens of Uzbekistan (L2CU) survey, jointly undertaken in 2018 by the World Bank and UNICEF.

Social Protection with Universal Approach

The UN Joint Programme advocates for a universal approach, when assistance is provided to every citizen of the country. The Programme suggests a short analysis of why the selected approach should be considered over the targeted approach, when aid is directed only to those in greatest need.

Numerous studies¹ have proved that targeted programmes often lead to significant errors of exclusion – on average, at least 50% of the population that should receive social assistance is mistakenly excluded from social assistance programs due to inaccurate methods of assigning benefits and the use of subjective criteria.

Also, there is a misconception that targeted social assistance helps to fight dependency sentiments in society. If you look closely, you can see that it is the targeted approach that promotes the development of dependency and reduces the incentives to get out of poverty. For example, according to the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 44, the employment of a mother who receives childcare benefits for low-income families is one of the reasons why the benefit is terminated. Considering that in many workplaces, especially for low-skilled personnel, the salary is slightly higher than the amount of the allowance, then, naturally, even with the availability of jobs, the unwillingness to lose the allowance can lead to a conscious choice to remain unemployed.

In general, with a targeted approach, it turns out that we create additional incentives to stay in poverty, unemployment, etc. At the same time, the decoupling of social assistance from the level of income or the termination of payments only when income is significantly higher than the allowance contributes to the fact that a person tries to improve his/her situation, and does not cling to the allowance as the only possible source of income.

It is important to note that a universal approach preserves the honor and dignity of beneficiaries. In other words, they do not receive benefits because they are poor or needy, but because they are members of society. In the absence of complex procedures for determining income or the degree of need, universal programs are easy to implement and have low administrative costs. Moreover, this approach contributes to increasing social cohesion in society.

Naturally, the total cost of social assistance with a universal approach usually exceeds the cost of a targeted approach. But the difference is not significant. In addition, if there is a political will, it is possible to introduce a universal approach step-by-step and thus avoid a sudden increase in the government's fiscal obligations. Also, you can always use a combined approach with elements of universal and targeted approaches.

For example, instead of using income or wealth that are difficult to measure reliably, you can resort to so-called categorical targeting. That is, instead of



Photo: @UNICEF/Nematov

New Opportunities for Disabled People Organisations and Civil Society Initiatives

There are about 90 non-governmental and non-profit organisations (NGOs) operating in Uzbekistan, that contribute to social support, adaptation and protection of the rights of people with disabilities. However, the corona-virus pandemic and protection of these NGOs are experiencing tangible lack of financial resources and technical support than before to implement their social projects and initiatives.

Considering this, the Joint Programme announced a call for Disabled People Organisations proposals. The call aimed at increasing the access of people with disabilities to social protection and ensuring their inclusion in various aspects of public life, as well as introducing innovative approaches in the provision of comprehensive social protection for people with disabilities, especially women and young people in the context of COVID-19.

In this regard, from 14 August to 15 September, as part of the implementation of Component 3 of the

Joint Program on Social Protection, a micro-grants contest was launched to support user-led pilot social initiatives in line with ICF for organisations of people with disabilities and civil society initiatives.

In the framework of the application process, 37 proposals representing various ideas for promoting interests of people with disabilities were received. Each proposal was evaluated against the contest assessment criteria by the contest selection committee consisted of representatives of UNDP, UNICEF and ILO. The committee awarded 11 social projects for total grant amount of 54,000 USD.




Photo: @UNICEF

Research

Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic situation in Uzbekistan


The report attempts to assess effects of the negative impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic situation in Uzbekistan for a number of indicators. For this purpose, both quantitative and qualitative assessment methods were used in rapid surveys.

Remarkably, the report focuses not only on assessing the effects of the influence of COVID-19, but also on a number of measures for the country's post-crisis development. In particular, the document suggests improving legislation in the field of labour relations, extending social protection coverage with particular programmes and improving their adequacy, as well as strengthening the social dialogue. The report, and in particular suggested policy

options, follow the ILO's Four Pillar Policy Framework for tackling the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis based on international labour standards which incorporate: the need to support enterprises, jobs and incomes; stimulate the economy and employment; protect workers and workplaces underpinned by social dialogue.

This assessment complements and further informs the ILO ongoing initiative on the development of a

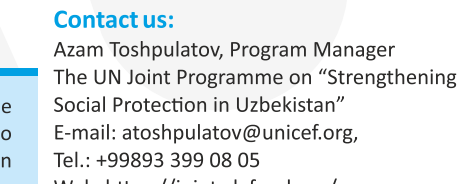
national employment strategy and will contribute to development of a national strategy on social protection implemented within the UN Joint Programme. This is of particular importance as the experience shows that post COVID-19 recovery will be aided by social protection and employment policies that cohere and complement each other; and are supported by overall macro-economic framework.



Assessment of the Social Protection System in Uzbekistan

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Uzbekistan, reform of the social protection system is gaining more urgency. What is the role of social protection? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Uzbekistan's social protection system? How can the national social protection system be strengthened to maintain living standards and build resilience to shocks like COVID-19?

Some of the answers can be found in a new study by ILO, UNICEF, and the World Bank launched jointly with the 'Yuksalish' Nationwide Movement on 12 August 2020.



Announcement

The ILO's Global Flagship Programme on Building Social Protection Floors for All, launched in early 2016, supports the implementation of social protection systems including floors, guided by ILO's social security standards. It aims to contribute to providing 130 million people with better access to social protection by 2020 and to serve as an engagement platform for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals targets 1.3 and 3.8 in particular.

UNICEF, ILO and the World Bank released the study on the system of social protection in Uzbekistan

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