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# ANALYTICAL REPORT ON THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA AND AZERBAIJAN

**Countries: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,  
Tajikistan, Turkmenistan**

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## **FROM THE AUTHORS**

The past five years have brought significant changes in the status of disability rights in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. The role of civil society in the promotion of disability rights cannot be overstated. Civil society organizations have first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by people with disabilities (PWDs), and are working on a daily basis to advocate for disability rights, raise awareness about ongoing issues through various public platforms, and ultimately reduce social barriers and improve dialogue between the government and the broader public. Each of the target countries has its own unique history and experience with disability rights. For this reason, a closer examination of individual approaches is needed to identify which policies and practices may be relevant to all stakeholders in the region.

This analytical report is the culmination of a research study conducted in four countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) and Azerbaijan in spring 2017. The primary focus of the study was disability rights, which have a direct impact on the quality of life experienced by people with disabilities, and analysis of potential strategies and opportunities for civil society organizations to improve disability rights in target countries.

Through the study, the research team followed the latest legislative and policy changes relevant to disability rights, and identified and documented best practices, lessons learned, and key challenges related to the promotion and protection of disability rights in the region.

The findings in this report will be of interest to a broad audience interested in the promotion of disability rights in the region, as it provides a closer look at the current status of PWDs in target countries, the work of the nongovernmental sector, and successful models for interventions which can lead to greater protection of disability rights and improvements in the quality of life for PWDs. The results of the study can be used to improve existing government policies on disability rights, disseminate best practices among target countries, and improve engagement between the government, civil society, and business sectors on the issue of disability rights promotion in the region.

This report was prepared by researchers from CAFD (Kazakhstan) with support from national experts from the Union of Organizations of People with Disabilities of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan), the “Ravenstvo” Union of People with Disabilities of Issykul Oblast (Kyrgyzstan), “Kishti” Center (Tajikistan), and “Enme” (Turkmenistan), within the framework of the “Partnership for Innovation – P41” program, implemented by Civil Society Development Association “ARGO” (Kazakhstan) and key partners in the countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan with financial support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

## GLOSSARY

**Disability** – result of interaction between people with special needs with other barriers which hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal level with others.

**Disability Groups** (1, 2, 3) – the legal and medical classifications of people with disabilities in Central Asia. People with disabilities are identified as group “1”, “2”, or “3” by a social-medical assessment commission, based on the nature and severity of physical or cognitive impairments and the extent to which impairments limit daily activities, including employability.

**Disabled Persons (also: *People with Disabilities*)** – people with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, when compounded by additional barriers, can interfere with full and effective participation in society at the same level as their peers.

**Inclusive Education** – term used to describe the learning process of children with special needs in standard schools. Inclusive education is based on an ideology that excludes any discrimination of children and ensures equal treatment for all people, while providing specific conditions, including infrastructure, for children with special educational needs.

**Physical Infrastructure** – ramps (*inclined pathways and entrances for wheelchair users or low-mobility citizens*), handrails, wide doors, adapted bathrooms and toilets, convenient paths and roads, availability of adapted transportation, etc.

**Social Protection of Disabled Persons** – a system of economic, social, and legal measures guaranteed by the state, which provides conditions for people with disabilities to eliminate or reduce limitations and barriers and create opportunities for public participation equal to those of other citizens.

**UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** – an international agreement, which defines the rights of persons with disabilities as well as the obligations of the signatories of the Convention to promote, protect, and defend these rights. Governments which ratify the Convention are legally bound by the standards of the Convention. For other states, the Convention represents an international standard that they must strive to respect.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on December 13, 2006 and opened it for signature on March 30, 2007.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ASAN – Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network

BCR – Building Codes and Regulations

CA – Central Asia

CAFD – Central Asia Forum of People with Disabilities

CFS – “Child-Friendly Schools” Program

CRPD – UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSO – Civil Society Organization

CSPO – Center for the Study of Public Opinion

CWD – Children with Disabilities

IDP – Individual Development Plan

KR – Kyrgyz Republic

MLSP – Ministry of Labor and Social Protection

MW – Minimum Wage

PMLC - Psycho-medical-learning Consultations

PWD – People with Disabilities

RA – Republic of Azerbaijan

RK – Republic of Kazakhstan

RT – Republic of Tajikistan

SGB – Special Government Benefits

SMA – Socio-medical Assessment

SSB – State Social Benefits

SSSF - State Social Security Fund

UN – United Nations

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

WHO – World Health Organization

## INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, it is commonly believed that a country's level of "civilization" can be measured by how it treats the elderly, children, and people with disabilities, as evidenced by national policy as well as by the quality of life of these vulnerable groups. People with disabilities (PWDs) comprise a significant percentage of the world's population. According to the WHO, there are currently more than one billion people living with disabilities, or 15% of the total population, including 95 million children (5.1%). Recent increases in the total number of people with disabilities can be attributed to a number of factors, including increased life expectancy, increased prevalence of chronic illnesses, and increased prevalence of accidental injuries.

A growing trend has been observed in recent years: a gradual shift away from the view of PWDs as simply recipients of charity and towards an exclusively human-rights-based approach. The adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) <sup>1</sup> in 2006 at the international level marked a revolutionary breakthrough in the development of society. A transition occurred, as the public went from seeing PWDs as "objects" of charity, medical treatment, and social services, to perceiving PWDs as "subjects" or actors with the rights and abilities to independently make decisions about their lives and be active members of society. For countries that signed and ratified the CRPD, the document provides a strong regulatory framework for national policies and practices, and allows PWDs to fully exercise their rights.

The geographic scope of the research study included Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Adoption of the CRPD varies by country, based on the political will of national leaders, the economic situation, and the strength of civil society. Azerbaijan ratified the CRPD and its Optional Protocol in October 2008. Kazakhstan signed the CRPD in December 2008, and ratified the Convention in February 2015 (*note: the Optional Protocol has not been ratified*). Tajikistan has not signed or ratified the CRPD. Turkmenistan became the first country in Central Asia to adopt the CRPD, signing in September 2008 ratifying the Optional Protocol in 2010. This study analyzes the relationship between CRPD adoption and the real status of people of disabilities in each country.

The study examined legal, social, economic, and other aspects of the lives of PWDs in target countries, from the perspective of PWDs and local experts collected over a three-year period, and building on existing research conducted within this time period in the region.

The goal of this study is not to describe in detail all programs in place for PWDs in each country. The goal instead is to describe current trends in national strategies, to the extent to that they address human rights and the status-quo of the rights of PWDs in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, and to present recommendations for civil society on those issues most relevant to PWDs.

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<sup>1</sup>The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006 and entered into force May 3, 2008 (on the 13<sup>th</sup> day following the accession or ratification of its 20<sup>th</sup> member government).

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### 1. BRIEF SUMMARY OF POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN THE COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL ASIA AND AZERBAIJAN ON THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

#### AZERBAIJAN

##### KEY STATISTICS



586,180 people with disabilities in Azerbaijan (6% of the total population), according to 2016 data from the National Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan. <sup>2,3</sup>

586,180 people with disabilities (6%)



Of these: 67,081 are children with disabilities, 374,466 receive disability benefits (159,808 women, 214,568 men), 139,041 receive social benefits, 29,384 of those who receive benefits are employed. Sex-disaggregation of PWD statistics on total recipients of social benefits or on students with disabilities are not available.

374,466 receive disability benefits

159,808 women

214,568 men, 29,384 work



139,041 PWDs receive disability benefits

67,081 children with disabilities

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/healthcare>

<sup>3</sup> <http://udpo.az/category.php?lang=1&content=346>



Thirteen treatment centers, 14 rehabilitation centers, and 11 residential facilities are currently operated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Azerbaijan.



A total of 65 non-governmental organizations are currently working with people with disabilities (there are a total of 4,000 non-governmental organizations in the country). The accepted terminology complies with CRPD – people with special needs.

4,000 NGOs  
65 NGOs for disability issues

The ratification of the Convention led to changes in the status of PWDs and increased awareness within the government and the wider public about the issues which PWDs face. The country began the process of aligning internal legal norms and policies with the standards of the Convention, within the framework of existing national law. A working group was created for the development of new legislation on disability rights in Azerbaijan, and included representatives of 19 government Ministries and Departments, five CSOs, and two international organizations. A new law on PWD rights was drafted and, following review by national and international analysts, forwarded to the Cabinet of Ministers for further review by the *Milli Medzhlis* (National Parliament). Existing laws on construction were amended to reflect the need for greater physical independent and adapted facilities to allow for greater independence of PWDs. As part of a state social contract with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP), the Union of Disabled Persons of Azerbaijan developed “Rules for the Creation of Equal Opportunities in Design and Construction for PWD and People with Mobility Challenges.”

## HISTORY OF DISABILITY RIGHTS IN AZERBAIJAN

### 1992

First law on disability rights adopted (*largely related to social protection of PWDs, later amended over 50 times*).

### August 2006

Promotion of the ratification of CRPD and its Protocol in Azerbaijan by PWD organizations, with the support of the Ombudsman.

### October 2008

Ratification of the CRPD and Protocol.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mlsp.gov.az/az/pages/263>



**2008 (updated in April 2017)**

Creation of a Working Group for representatives of government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs to coordinate on UN Convention implementation activities.

**January 2011**

Delivery of report by Ministry of Labor and Social Protection reports to the UN Committee on 5 Alternative Reports.

**May 2011**

Official order by the head of the Administration of the President of Azerbaijan’s Ombudsman to create independent mechanisms for CRPD implementation (*to date, the structure has yet to be established*).

**2014**

“Action Plan for Disability Rights, 2014-2018” developed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection in coordination with PWD organizations.<sup>5</sup>

**April 2014**

The national report was presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Disability Rights in Geneva; 57 recommendations were developed for the implementation of disability rights law.

**September 2015**

Independent “Public Chamber” created under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, comprised of 15 NGOs, including 10 PWD organizations.

**KAZAKHSTAN**

**KEY STATISTICS**



651,900 people with disabilities in Kazakhstan (3.6% of the total population), according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Kazakhstan. Sex-aggregated data is not available.

651,900 people with disabilities

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mlsp.gov.az/az/pages/4/279>



*Statistics on students with disabilities: there are currently 374 university students with disabilities; 46% of them are women.*

374 students  
46% female



*schools*



*161 colleges*

*3,905 Inclusive education is offered in 3,905 schools (55% of the total number of schools) and 161 colleges (20% of the total number of higher education institutions).*



- 42 specialized kindergartens, attended by 5,160 children with speech, hearing, or visual impairments, intellectual or cognitive disabilities, musculoskeletal disabilities, or mental health disabilities,
- 193 specialized groups in standard preschools, attended by 8,754 children
- 97 standard primary schools, attended by 14,275 children with special needs, including children with disabilities
- 207 offices for 58 psycho-medical-learning consultations (PMLC) and 149 offices for psycho-learning therapy, through which more than 44,000 children with special needs receive intervention services.
- more than 6,000 teachers work in specialized educational institutions
- conditions created for 2,000 students with disabilities to study in technical and professional institutions and 163 colleges (of 817 total)

Opportunities for PWDs have increased in recent years. This has been made possible by systematic and ongoing positive changes. In addition, the necessary economic and political conditions have been created. The country is gaining a positive reputation internationally; Kazakhstan aims to join the ranks of the top 30 most competitive countries in the world. For this reason, the status of children, people with disabilities, and the elderly receives considerable attention.

Significant drivers of change include the ratification of CRPD, the initiatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), and regular dialogue with the government. Government representatives acknowledge the noted the crucial role played by CSOs – they present recommendations, participate

in public meetings with the *akimat* or local administrations, Ministries, Parliament, and National Government, advocate for legislative initiatives, participate in government social procurement, and win grants and awards for their contributions to community development. However, CSO representatives note that their recommendations and proposals are not always given sufficient consideration by government agencies.

## HISTORY OF DISABILITY RIGHTS IN KAZAKHSTAN

**2005**

Law on Social Protection adopted.

**2005**

National government of Kazakhstan created the *Coordination Council on the Social Protection of People with Disabilities*; 64% of members were NGO representatives.

**2008**

Signing of the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (CRPD).

**2013**

External advisor on disability issues role established for select representatives of public organizations.

**2014**

External Advisors named to Ministries and *Akimats* in all 16 regions of the country.

**February 2015**

Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (CRDP).

**December 2015**

With the goal of bringing existing national legislation into compliance with CRPD norms, the law “On Changes and Additions to a Number of Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Disability Rights” was adopted, introducing changes to 24 legal acts, including four in the Code.

**March 2016**

Approval of the plan to monitor CRPD, which includes monitoring indicators, agencies responsible for implementation, and monitoring timelines.

**2016**

Amendments to by-laws governing automotive, railroad, and air transportation, social protection, public health, employment, education, internal affairs, housing, and information.

**April 2017**

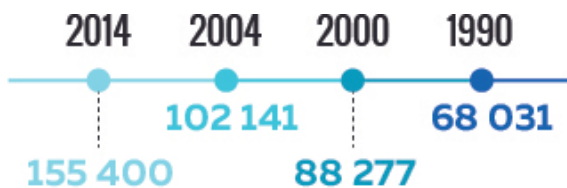
Development of an initial progress report on implementation of CRPD; the report was sent to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in accordance with Article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

KEY STATISTICS



172, 000 PWDs live in Kyrgyzstan, or 2.6% of the total population, as of January 1, 2017.

172,000 people with disabilities



For comparison – as of January 1, 2014, a total of 155,400 PWDs lived in the country; in 1990 – 68,031, in 2002 – 88,277, and in 2004 – 102,141.

Government statistics in Kyrgyzstan on the lives of PWDs is limited, and are determined largely through analysis of public health and social protection indicators. Sex-aggregated data and statistics on students with disabilities are not available.



The system maintained by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Kyrgyzstan includes 14 in-patient institutions (residential), 13 of which are funded through the national budget.



These institutions are home to 2,301 people, including 758 people in in-patient institutions for the elderly and people with disabilities, 1,182 people in adult psychiatric hospitals, and 361 people in children's psychiatric hospitals.

2,301 people

Nataliya Nikitenko, member of the Zhogorku Kenesha: *“I think that members of Parliament would ratify this document, as the issues of people with disabilities are actively discussed by committees and in meetings. We have brought this issue to the National Government in writing multiple times. We received the answer from the Ministry of Finance, “There’s no money.” But that’s not an answer.”*

The state policy of Kyrgyzstan on disability rights is characterized by a strictly medical interpretation of the concept of disability: “impairments of a person’s health which have a lasting impact on physical functions, leading to full or significant loss of the ability to work or significant restrictions to everyday activities of people with disabilities.”<sup>6</sup> A range of social services for PWDs are available in the country on both a short-term and a long-term basis. Services are provided only through hospitals or clinics, including residential facilities, which contributes to isolation of PWDs from the public.<sup>7</sup>

According to discussions with local researchers, however, the work of human rights activists and the intentions of the government to give PWDs the opportunity to work and freely use public infrastructure dominate the concept of equal rights. In Kyrgyzstan, the number of PWDs and international experts who view “disability” as more than a medical issue, but as a human rights issue, is growing. Joint promotion of CRPD ratification is one example of this new understanding. In the opinion of Member of the *Zhogorku Kenesha* Parliament, Nataliya Nikitenko, there are no obligations in the Convention which are not currently reflected in the laws of Kyrgyzstan. The ratification of the Convention would stimulate the implementation of measures which the government is responsible for one way or another.

However, in practice, many laws and regulations fail to move beyond the initial declaration and have little positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities. According to civil society experts, the country should ratify the Convention and adopt measures for implementation. Ratification is anticipated in December 2017.

## ***TIMELINE OF DISABILITY RIGHTS IN KYRGYZSTAN***

### **December 2011**

Resolution of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, “On the Strategy for the Development of Social Protection of the Population of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2012-2014”

### **December 2013**

Resolution of the Government of Kyrgyzstan “On Comprehensive Measures for the Protection of Rights and Improvements in the Quality of Life for People with Special Needs in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2014-2017.”

### **December 2013**

Resolution of the Government of Kyrgyzstan, “On the Appointment of the *Akiekatchi* (Ombudsman) of the Kyrgyz Republic for Parliamentary Monitoring of the Rights and Freedoms of People with Special Needs.”

<sup>6</sup> Law of Kyrgyzstan, “On the Rights and Guarantees of People with Special Health Needs”

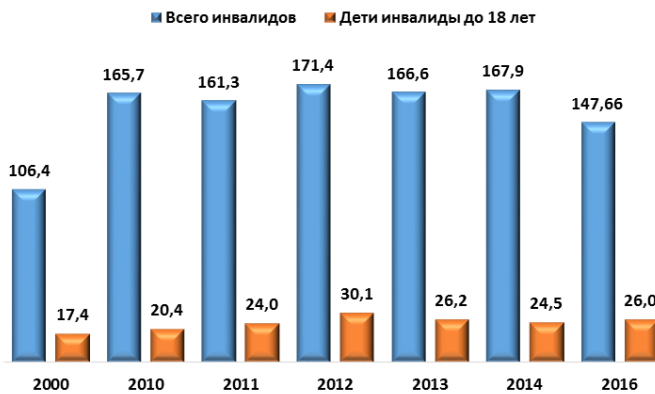
<sup>7</sup> Resolution of the Government of Kyrgyzstan public of October 14, 2016 No. 552 “Program for the Development of Social Protection of the Population of the Kyrgyzstan for 2015-2017”

## TAJIKISTAN

### KEY STATISTICS



147,656 PWDs are living in Tajikistan; of these, 26,000 are CWDs.



Data on the total number of registered PWDs (adults and children under 18 years old) in 2000 and for the period from 2010-2016 are presented in the diagram. Data is disaggregated by sex, and statistics on students with disabilities are not available.

(blue) Total number of PWDs; (orange) CWDs under 18 years old

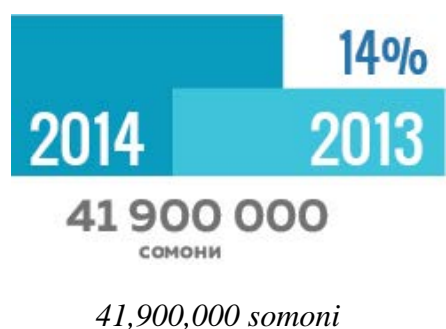


According to 2014 data, a total of \$1.59 million (14 million somoni) of the national budget of the government of Tajikistan on care for PWDs, including \$2,800 on daily care services.

14,000,000 somoni      24,800 somoni



1,371 PWDs received technical aids (prostheses, orthotics, wheelchairs, and other equipment for mobility) valued at \$43,000 (37,900 somoni) in 2014.



Total government expenditures on these services equaled \$4.75 million dollars (41.9 somoni) in 2014. This represents a 14% increase over 2013 expenditures, which included disability benefits.



153,248 people (including 25,086 children) received social benefits and disability payments as of January 2015, including children with disabilities from birth, people disabled later in life, and people injured on the job.<sup>8</sup>

The adopted norms require active commitment from stakeholders as well as practical implementation, which itself requires appropriate financial, human, technical, and other resources. Civil society and international organizations have supporting these efforts for a number of years, and have appealed to the government of Tajikistan to ratify the CRPD.

## TIMELINE OF DISABILITY RIGHTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

### 2010

Series of targeted legal acts adopted under the law “On the Social Protection of People with Disabilities.”

### 2011

National Concept for Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities adopted to provide children with access to education without discrimination.

<sup>8</sup> No. 2.2 National Program for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities for 2017-2020, approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan No. 455 from 10.28.2016.

**2014**

Legislative framework created which responds to the primary provisions and principles of CRPD (as a result of the research study “Comparative Rights Analysis of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” and the laws of the Republic of Tajikistan, “Comprehensive Evaluation of the Economic Potential of Tajikistan to Implement the Provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Personas with Disabilities” in the country).

**2014**

Interdepartmental Coordination Council of Experts created with the goal of preparing recommendations for the Government on the alignment of existing legislation with CRPD provisions.

**2016**

National Program for the Rehabilitation of People with Special Needs for 2017-2020 adopted. Adoption of documents declaring that PWDs shall have equal opportunities to receive all social services: public health, rehabilitation, education, employment, professional training, culture, sports, transportation, recreation and entertainment, information technology, and public spaces.

**October 2016**

“Declaration of the Approval of the National Program for the Rehabilitation of PWDs for 2016-2020” adopted, promoting not only disability rights, but also addressing disability benefits, social services, rehabilitation, provision of prosthetics and orthotics, and all relevant benefits and other government guarantees addressed by international rights as well as by the legislation of Tajikistan.

**2017**

Expansion of the national rehabilitation center system from 3 in 2010 to 30, presenting new institutional opportunities for promoting PWD rights.

## TURKMENISTAN

### KEY STATISTICS



**122 612** людей с инвалидностью **1.4%**

*122,612 People with Disabilities*

*122,612 people with disabilities lived in Turkmenistan as of January 1, Sex-aggregated data and statistics on students with disabilities are not available.*

The constitution of Turkmenistan forbids discrimination on the basis of disability. The official policy on PWD issues in the country is characterized by social protection measures for PWDs, as defined through various laws and codes, including “*On the Guarantee of the Rights of Children*”, “*On Government Guarantees of the Various Rights of Women*”, “*On Social Benefits*”, “*On Public Organizations*”, “*On the Public Health of Citizens*”, “*Law on Education*”, “*Labor Code*”, “*Code of Criminal Procedures*”, and other legal acts.



In compliance with international obligations, Turkmenistan has adopted the principles and norms of CRPD into its legislation, norms, and regulations. Newly-adopted legal acts reflect the norms of international agreements on human rights, including disability rights. Protecting the rights of PWDs was and remains an integral component of national policy and is reflected in many new laws and codes. As previously, PWDs have full socioeconomic, political, and personal rights and freedoms, guaranteed by the constitution and national legislation.

Turkmenistan has achieved considerable progress towards a number of provisions in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Public health laws guarantee a wide range of free services and support. In recent years, the government has improved policies and standards on barrier-free access to government buildings, recreation sites, cultural institutions, and public housing; accessibility requirements are enshrined in national law.

### ***TIMELINE OF DISABILITY RIGHTS IN TURKMENISTAN***

**September 2008**

Became first country in CA to ratify the CRPD.

**2010**

Ratification of the CRPD Protocol.

**2011**

Concept for inclusive education developed.

**2012**

Social benefits for PWDs increased by 80% following changes to the “Social Security Code”

**January 2013**

“Code of Turkmenistan on the Social Protection of the Population”, which includes support measures for PWDs, entered into force. The Code defines “disability” in accordance with Article 1 of the CRPD.

**May 2014**

Law “On Government Guarantees of Children’s Rights” adopted, defining children with disabilities as those children with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, when compounded by additional barriers, can interfere with full and effective participation in society at the same level as their peers.

**January 2016**

“National Human Rights Action Plan for 2015-2020” approved; plan includes activities to create a favorable physical environment for people with disabilities to access public facilities.

**2016**

“Action Plan for Full Implementation of Disability Rights in Labor and Employment for 2017-2010” adopted; plan aims to provide social and labor rehabilitation for PWDs and encourage full realization of their creative potential.

**AZERBAIJAN**

CSO representatives and government agencies note the country's strong legislative framework in support of disability rights. Focus group participants welcomed Azerbaijan's ratification of the CRPD and Protocol, the development of new laws on the rights of people with disabilities, the development of standardized regulations for people with disabilities, and positive amendments to legal policies designed to improve the lives of PWDs. Overall, the Azerbaijani public views public participation of PWD favorably. The government and the general public (primarily young people) have changed their attitude towards PWD, and the private sector has demonstrated interest in cooperation and employments. Implementation of these laws, however, has failed to keep pace with policy development; positive changes in the general public have thus far proven insufficient, and require even greater expansion.

***Social Protection***

In Azerbaijan, there are 14 operating rehabilitation centers, but the Nation Center for Rehabilitation in Baku is most widely visited, due to its highly-trained staff and modern technology and equipment. In the capital, cities, and rural regions, more than local 30 rehabilitation centers and outpatient centers have been established at the community level. Notably, these centers are supported by grants from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. PWD housing and transport issues are currently under consideration. A separate category of PWDs, including people disabled defending the country's territory during conflicts with neighboring Armenia, are provided with housing and vehicles. People with disabilities with work experience receive a pension; those without work experience receive social benefits. The total value of benefits varies; those social benefits paid by the government is significantly lower.

***Public Opinion***

Over the last 2-3 years, public understanding of the concept of "disability" has improved. Although the "medical" model of disability persists, a "human-rights-based approach" is slowly gaining gain traction. This slow pace is the primary reason for the failure to enforce existing legislation.

***Public and Political Participation***

Representatives of PWD CSOs serve as members of the independent Public Chamber under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, serve in the Expert Group under the Ombudsman on Human Rights, and participate in the development of draft legislation in the Parliament, *Milli Medzhlis*. Public organizations have increased their capacity to monitor PWD rights and present public, alternative reports to the UN Committee.

***Active Lifestyle***

The National Paralympic Committee of Azerbaijan holds a specific place in the lives of people with disabilities. Since 1996, PWDs have participated in seven olympiads and won 35 medals. Azerbaijan is home to seven Paralympic champions, including two two-time champions, seven world champions, 14 European championship winners, and seven champions of the World Paralympic Games. Azerbaijan was also the first country in the world to create a Children's

Paralympic Committee. Athletics is one of the few arenas in the country in which diverse opportunities are created for PWDs.

### ***Education***

In practice, PWDs face challenges accessing primary, secondary, and higher education. The law on education has no separate provisions for inclusive education. More than 24,000 children with disabilities are receiving education in a variety of formats. The majority study at home, with a smaller number learning at “closed” educational institutions. Only 288 children with disabilities participate in inclusive education in three pilot schools; these low numbers can be attributed to poor physical accessibility of educational facilities, lack of trained staff, limited understanding of “disability”, limited preparedness of society to “accept” children with disabilities, and lack of appropriate programming, resource materials, and equipment. There is a similar situation in professional and higher education institutions. This study found that there are currently no more than 200 students with disabilities enrolled in higher education institutions. Note, official statistics are not available.

### ***Employment***

According to the State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan, 29,384 PWD currently receiving disability benefits are employed. In Azerbaijan, the law mandates a quota for employing members of certain social groups, including people with disabilities.<sup>9</sup> However, the law is not enforced, despite a fine valued at three times the monthly minimum wage (MW). PWDs are not competitive on the labor market due to their lack of secondary, professional, or higher education. Inaccessible physical environments further limit employment opportunities for PWDs.

However, over the past three years, a number of companies have expressed interest in employing PWDs. These companies reached out to PWD CSOs through online social networks in search of potential employees. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection has launched a “self-employment” program, which allows PWDs to create and expand their own businesses. CSOs serving PWDs also receive preferential rights to state social service contracts. However, in spite of these initiatives, businesses continue to demonstrate a lack of interest in hiring PWDs. The law on corporate social responsibility is also not enforced.

### ***Physical Access***

Broadly speaking, physical infrastructure is not adapted for people with diverse disabilities. Notable exceptions include the Gaidar Aliyev Airport<sup>10</sup>, the high court of the Ministry of Justice<sup>11</sup>, the Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network (ASAN) under the President of Azerbaijan<sup>12</sup>, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA)<sup>13</sup>, and the National Paralympic Committee<sup>14</sup>. Public facilities, including state service agencies, educational institutions, and employment offices are frequently inaccessible to PWDs. In addition, problems persist accessing equal justice, as well as gaining equal access to voting stations. The lack of state financing had reduced access to family planning resources and the full exercise of reproductive rights of PWDs.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/11456>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.vipavia.az>

<sup>11</sup> <http://justice.gov.az>

<sup>12</sup> <http://vxsida.gov.az>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ada.edu.az>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.paralympic.az>

### ***Self-Confidence and Legal Literacy***

The majority of PWDs have a low level of awareness about their rights and how to protect them. Many report having low expectations for their lives and, as a result, there is limited participation of PWDs in the public and political life of communities.

## **KAZAKHSTAN**

Coordination between Ministries, *akimats*, and the prosecutor's office has recently improved. Responsibility for the implementation of national disability rights policy has been divided among these institutions; previously, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection was primarily responsible for PWD issues.

A number of positive tendencies can be seen in Kazakhstan, including the development of private initiatives supported by independent businessmen, designed to address issues commonly faced by PWD, as well as the work of private foundations targeting such issues as children's autism, Down syndrome, and other specific health concerns (i.e. "Dara" Foundation, etc.) However, significant change will only be achieved through systematic and ongoing shifts; current efforts are largely short-term and heavily dependent on the wishes of donor organizations. There is also a need to share achievements and results to date with government representatives in order to facilitate widespread dissemination of best practices at the national level.

Following ratification of CRPD in 2015, it was widely expected that a universal mechanism would be created to monitor compliance with the Convention. Two years later, however, monitoring compliance of the Convention's provisions continues to fall to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, which also coordinates disability issues. The Convention recommends that countries establish a separate monitoring body.

An important indicator of a country's respect for disability rights is the status of people with mental disorders. In the past three years, both the government and civil society organizations have shown increased interest in the rights of this population. The process of de-institutionalization is currently underway among residential care facilities for patients with intellectual and mental disorders. Initiatives which involve people with intellectual disorders in employment can be found in the city of Almaty (i.e. project "Training Café" and others), and a coalition of public organizations has been created to represent the interests of people with intellectual and mental disorders, with the primary goal of countering negative public stereotypes in the community through awareness-raising.

It is important to continue to increase the pace of development and scale-up of positive changes among the general public, civil servants, and the business community.

### ***Social Protection***

New social services have been offered in Kazakhstan since 2005, and the list of support resources for PWD is regularly expanded and updated. Each year, state funding increases for PWD issues, including through state social contracts, procurement, and government awards. Yet existing measures have proven insufficient to achieve full participation of PWDs in many aspects of public life. The government is currently working to develop a sustainable system of social protection for PWDs. However, CRPD requires adherence to a human-rights based approach, which demands the

same rights for all citizens, including PWDs, regardless of lifestyle, to exercise their cultural, social, political, and economic rights without hindrance.

### ***Terminology***

According to recommendations from CSOs and UNICEF<sup>15</sup>, a clear and consolidated framework on PWD and CWD rights is needed which aligns with the provisions of the Convention. In particular, consensus is needed to standardize appropriate terminology used to describe people with mental disorders.

### ***Self-Confidence and Expectations***

According to 2013 research from the Center for the Study of Public Opinion (CSPO), PWDs have fewer opportunities to actively participate in their communities at the same level as other citizens. Combined with stigma and limited acceptance within the broader population, these limitations lead to greater isolation of PWDs. Limited social participation in particular affects PWDs with a secondary level of education or lower, low-income PWDs, and unmarried PWDs. These issues must be taken into consideration in the development of social support programs for PWDs, and in the development of information and awareness-raising campaigns.

### ***Physical Access***

Following CRPD ratification, the government began to improve physical access. PWD CSOs participate in commissions to monitor public awareness of disability access issues. In the past three years, over 29,000 buildings across the country (*80% of the planned total*) have been assessed and documented; a total of 11,800 buildings have been modified or otherwise adapted for PWD accessibility since 2014. In March 2017, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, with support from the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan, held a meeting with entrepreneurs with the goal of discussing issues of access and employment for PWDs.

Yet according to respondents, access to public facilities and cultural institutions remains limited. In June 2017, the Ombudsman for Human Rights sent a formal letter to the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan identifying a number of unresolved issues. Ramps in buildings frequently fail to comply with established technical standards – they are often too steep, have poorly-placed handrails, or are lined with slippery tile, in violation of construction codes. Buildings and their entryways are not equipped with audio, tactile signs or walkways, or lighted indicators. Use of public transportation is complicated by the lack of accessible bus stops, information for people with hearing or visual impairments, or relevant training for drivers.

“Inva-taxi” services are in high demand in Kazakhstan. The specialized transportation services are provided on an ongoing basis to registered PWDs with limited mobility and vision, and are funded through the national budget. A total of 68 such services are currently in operation around the country, and include CSO service providers. However, “Inva-taxi” services are developing separately from public transportation, which would also be in high demand among PWDs if access issues were addressed.

### ***Employment***

A total of 651,900 PWD reside in Kazakhstan; of these, 62.8% are of working age, 25% are of retirement age, and 12.1% are under the age of 18. A total of 120,000 PWDs are employed full-time. In 2011, 4,000 PWDs were employed; in 2016, 12,000 PWD were employed through quotas, job

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.kz/children/work/proekti/2891.php>

fairs, etc. Workplace standards for PWDs were developed for workers with visual and audio impairments and/or mobility issues. PWD employment is taken seriously by the government, as evidenced by the number of PWDs working in Ministries, government agencies, and local administrations across the country.

An employment support program is in place for PWDs; in the period from 2011-2015, 916 PWDs started their own businesses. In 2016, 456 PWDs started their own businesses, creating 86 new jobs. In addition, access to credit and financing remains a stumbling block in the development of private enterprise among PWDs. As part of the credit approval process, banks require PWDs to provide a certificate of legal competency and, in the majority of instances, refuse financing and look on this group with some disdain.

The search for employment is further complicated by the fact that Kazakhstan lacks a system of professional orientation and guidance in the job search process, as noted by the Ombudsman for Human Rights in his recent appeal on human rights to the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan. The lack of adapted, accessible work conditions serves as an additional barrier.

In order to increase the competitiveness of products manufactured by PWD, additional support for PWD enterprises is needed from the nongovernmental sector and from local government agencies, within the framework of relevant legislation.<sup>16</sup>

#### ***Simplification of the Procedures for Accessing Services***

Kazakhstan has implemented an aggregated service system, which allow citizens to use a single electronic application to automatically register for three social services. The service package includes the initial socio-medical assessment (SMA) for social rehabilitation services prescribed in an individualized rehabilitation program, state social benefits (SSB) and special government benefits (SGB) for disability, as well as social payments from the State Social Security Fund (SSSF) in the event of loss of employability.

#### ***Education***

The Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan has created a specialized office tasked with the development of inclusive education (the Office of Inclusive and Special Education of the Department of Pre-school and Primary Education of the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan). A roadmap has been developed for the adoption of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, and relevant legislation is currently being amended. Conceptual approaches have been defined for the expansion of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, along with a series of measures for the development of an inclusive education system in 2015-2020.

Yet despite significant progress in the promotion of inclusive education, considerable work is still needed to engage local government agencies, as well as to advocate for the allocation of state resources for inclusive education at the community level. Stereotypes about PWDs continue to persist, as does alienation of parents of children without CWD towards CWD. Government initiatives to increase public awareness have generated positive results, but breaking stereotypes additional time and resources.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.kz/news/detail.php?ID=3535>

### ***Participation of PWD in Public and Political Life***

The active participation of people with disabilities in various levels of decision-making has increased the effectiveness of the resolution of local issues relevant to PWDs. In Kazakhstan, there is a single example at the level of the local Parliament, *Maslikhat*, in which a member represents the PWD community. At the national Parliamentary level, there are currently no members with disabilities.

Despite the considerable resources allocated by the government to increase the effectiveness of decision-making on PWD issues, research participants note the need for greater representation of PWD at all levels of legislative branches of government.

### ***Public Opinion***

As a result of public awareness-raising events, stereotypes are gradually changing. Focus group participants in Astana shared an example: Previously, events for the PWD community were held after work hours in order to limit public visibility (so as not to “scare” others, and so that children “wouldn’t point”, according to respondents). Now, PWD are invited to large events held at any times. Entrepreneurs are showing interest in PWD organizations, offering support, giving movie tickets to PWD, and organizing activities at their own expense.

## **KYRGYZSTAN**

Kyrgyzstan signed the CRPD, and has calculated the costs of compliance with the Convention’s standards. Recent efforts include purchasing services from PWD organizations through the state social contracting system. Positive changes have recently been observed in a number of spheres, including education, the development of a physically accessible environment, public opinion of PWD, and increased awareness about the lives of PWDs through media coverage. Collaboration with government agencies is taking place at a new level, and two-way dialogue has resulted in the resolution of a number of issues faced by PWD. At the local level, Members of Parliament increasingly represent the PWD population.

Disability rights reforms require financing, which is currently lacking at the national level. The majority of violations of disability rights are incurred from service providers, including *medical workers, teachers, Ministry staffers, and transportation representatives*, as a result of stereotypical assumptions about PWDs. Low self-esteem and limited legal literacy among PWD further contributes to violations their rights in the delivery of medical, educational, recreational, and other services. There is a notable lack of qualified specialists. Limited statistical data and information prevents the authors from providing a broad description of the current status of PWD, as with other countries.

### ***Education***

The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has positively impacted access to education for CWDs. In 2013, the law on education outlining a CWD quota system for college and university admissions was updated. A specialized preschool education program, “Nariste”, has been adopted at the national level, resulting in the launch of the adapted curriculum for CWDs in two schools. Local self-governance agencies have the opportunity to open special classes for children with special needs. A speech therapist is working to support the adaptation of CWDs into standard schools, and additional support is provided to teachers. Standards for public schools are currently

being piloted for CWD in eight areas. In addition, a group of government officials traveled to Moldova to study that country's experience and best practices in inclusive education.

The study identified the following barriers that hinder PWD access to primary and professional education:

- lack of appropriate qualifications among teachers to work with students with disabilities; lack of adapted materials and technologies for PWDs;
- educational curricula do not comply with inclusive education standards;
- transportation and infrastructure in educational institutions limit full engagement of PWDs in the educational process;
- lack of Support Centers in educational institutions for students with disabilities and for teachers working with PWDs;
- challenges interacting with students without disabilities;
- low income status of families of PWDs contributes to lack of funds for learning resources, transportation, meals, etc.

### ***Employment***

According to the study “Needs of PWD and Other Vulnerable Groups in the Sphere of Education and Employment”, only 31% of respondents are currently employed; of these 4% of PWDs. However, 44% of unemployed respondents indicated that they are interested in continuing their education/professional development in order to seek employment. However, there are currently no centers to support the job search and employment process for PWDs. Existing employment centers for the mainstream population are not an effective employment tool for PWDs. An article in the law of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan “*On Promoting Employment of the Population*” states that those citizens registered with “Group 1” or “Group 2” status, based on the severity of their disabilities, cannot register as unemployed with employment agencies, and therefore lose access to government supports for seeking employment.

### ***Public Opinion***

PWDs are quick to note that their identities are not wholly defined by their disabilities, and they want this fact to be recognized by others. Over the past several years, a number of media productions and events have been created with the goal of reducing the perceived differences between PWDs and the “healthy population”. A group of activists, “Nazikyzy”, published a photo calendar featuring girls and women with disabilities as glamorous models, and posing to draw attention away from their disabilities. Designers and models with disabilities also continue to participate in Kyrgyzstan's fashion weeks. All of these activities are widely promoted through local media platforms.

## **TAJIKISTAN**

Limited information on Tajikistan does not allow for detailed descriptions by social sector, as with other countries. Focus group participants noted the positive role of CSOs, which provide rehabilitation services for PWD, support the preparation and adaption of CWDs for school, and advocate for disability rights as part of a broader human-rights approach. The following positive changes were noted:

- Increased collaboration between community organizations and government agencies in the organization of seminars, trainings, and round tables which aim to support CWDs and their



parents, teachers, and doctors. Community organizations participate in the development of resources materials for teachers, doctors, and parents, as well as monitor the observance of CWD rights, including in the construction of accessible facilities.

- Recognition and creation of conditions for inclusive education for CWD. Adoption of a “Concept of Inclusive Education”.
- Increased adaptation of CWD among their peers without disabilities; parents are less intimidated in public, and are increasingly giving their children opportunities to participate in community life.
- Review of building codes and regulations (BCR) to better consider the needs of PWD. Ramps and elevators are now included in the design and construction of new buildings, and public transportation is increasingly equipped with adapted equipment and lift capabilities.
- Improvement of legislation concerning PWDs, including adoption of new policies which protect the right of PWDs to live full and active lives in the community; changes have been introduced to the laws “*On Education*” and “*On the Social Protection of PWD in Tajikistan*” to address the rights of CWD; a Program for PWD Rehabilitation 2016-2020 was approved at the national and regional levels.

Study participants report that recent changes and legislative amendments were made with consideration for the requirements and provisions of the CRPD, bring the country closer to ratification. According to respondents, changes were made possible as a result of the following:

- Increased awareness among parents of CWD about their children’s rights.
- Improvements in the medical services offered through rehabilitation centers.
- Provision of social services by public organizations in outpatient centers for PWD, CWD, and at-risk groups, financed through the Agency for Social Protection of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Protection of Tajikistan.
- Expanded forms of support to CSOs and CWD Support Centers.
- Collaboration between the government and international organizations to provide support to rehabilitation centers.
- Legislative amendments designed to enhance protections of CWD rights.

However, focus group respondents’ report that a number of daily challenges persist, and are in need of greater attention and action, including:

- Neglect of CWD rights, including the right to receive services without waiting in line, and the right to reduced payments, among others, by medical workers, service providers, and other citizens, including family members.
- Lack of strategy and a limited legislative framework to address disability issues; lack of a system for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of existing policies and quality standards for PWD service provision.
- Lack of full compliance with legal norms, including construction norms and rules in the development of new infrastructure and adaptations for PWDs.
- Low level of awareness among PWDs about their rights.
- Insufficient government financing for public health, rehabilitation services, and social protection.
- Poor coordination between partners working in the spheres of public health, rehabilitation, social protection, and education.
- Insufficient coverage of CSO services for PWD, especially in rural regions.
- Lack of qualified specialists in the spheres of public health, rehabilitation, and social protection.

- Insufficient coordination of employment support services at all levels, including in rural regions.
- Limited capacity of social service support systems for PWDs, including technical aids and equipment for rehabilitation.

Among the main reasons for the violation of the rights of CWD, parents named a low level of awareness and lack of information about their children's rights as guaranteed by law. In addition, participants cited the relatively low level of personal responsibility felt by medical workers providing CWD services. Among potential reasons for this lack of responsibility, respondents named low wages and prejudices towards PWDs based on stereotypes.

### ***Public Opinion***

Over the past decade, the general attitude towards PWDs has shifted in Tajikistan. If PWDs were previously seen only as recipients of reduced-cost social services, now there is a social movement seeking to recognize the rights of PWDs as equal to the rights of all citizens.

## **TURKMENISTAN**

Turkmenistan is the first country in the region to ratify CRPD. This indicates a strong legislative framework for PWDs. The reality of implementation, however, is more complicated. The law prohibits discrimination in employment, education, and access to public health and other social services. However, in spite of the law, PWD face discrimination – they are denied jobs, education, and access to healthcare and other social services due to a deeply-rooted culture of prejudice. As a result of efforts to comply with CRPD requirements and national laws protecting PWDs, the government has significantly increased public disability benefits, and is currently building rehabilitation centers. The government is also developing a law on quotas for businesses, which has resulted in, for example, employment of 10 women with hearing impairments at a textile college.

### ***Housing***

Recently, positive steps have been taken to resolve housing issues for PWDs; construction of accessible apartment buildings, schools, and kindergartens is underway. Reduced rates on utilities are also available to those citizens registered with “Group 1” or “Group 2” disability status, based on the nature of their limitations.

### ***Education***

Public education – primary, secondary, and higher/professional education – is provided for PWDs in standard education institutions, as well as in specialized educational institutions, as needed, in accordance with the law “*On Education*”. The government guarantees the provision of conditions needed to receive education and professional training. In accordance with Article 36 of the law “*On State Guarantees of the Rights of Children*”, all CWDs are provided with the conditions and access needed to receive education in standard educational institutions, i.e. inclusive education.

CWD can either study at educational institutions or at home, depending on parent preferences and the recommendations of medical workers. In the capital city and in all *velayti* (regions), educational complexes with rehabilitation centers have been built for both pre-school and school-age children which are equipped with modern medical and rehabilitation equipment. Following rehabilitation, children can continue their education in standard schools and pre-schools.

As part of the initiative “Child-Friendly Schools” (CFS), working groups were created at all levels of government and a series of recommendations were developed for CFS implementation. Recommendations emphasize inclusive education, which improves the effectiveness of the educational process and promotes the active participation of teachers, parents, and community members.

However, there are a number of discrepancies between the law on disabilities and supportive initiatives, and the daily realities of PWD in Turkmenistan. The 2013 law on education guarantees free and equal access to educational programs and inclusive education. At the same time, the law includes a provision on children with disabilities, stating that “those who cannot attend standard schools should receive education in specialized educational institutions.” Specialized schools faced a number of serious problems, including lack of amenities and insufficient physical access for children with disabilities of the musculoskeletal system, lack of trained teachers, and lack of contact with parents – resulting in gaps in parent support services.<sup>17</sup>

Students with disabilities cannot receive an education as a result of the lack of qualified teachers, as well as due to limited physical access within educational facilities. The law requires that universities conduct specialized admissions exams for incoming students with disabilities, however these students face challenges with admissions. CWD in residential institutions should receive education and professional training, but this is not currently the reality.

In partnership with international experts from UNICEF, local specialists have developed a roadmap for the development of inclusive education Turkmenistan. The roadmap was presented at an international conference on inclusive education in November 2014 in Ashgabat.

### ***Physical Access***

The law requires that new construction projects include accommodations to ensure access for PWDs, yet not all project comply with these rules. The lack of established standards results in the installation of unusable ramps. The public transportation system is likewise ill-equipped for use by PWDs. Presently, only a small percentage of PWD have access to the equipment and resources they need to live independent lives with maximum mobility and access to information and education.

### ***Professional Training and Employment***

According to numbers reported by the national Pension Fund on January 1, 2015, the number of employed PWDs, totals 9,809 individuals, or 8% of the total number of PWDs, and 76% of the total number of PWDs considered able to work. The decision to join the labor force is not made by individuals with disabilities themselves, but by a commission of social workers and medical personnel which makes recommendations on the type of work and working conditions appropriate for each individual; employers are required to provide these conditions. This limits employment opportunities for PWDs. Notably, the government considers PWD recipients of disability benefits to be “employed” and therefore unable to seek ‘additional’ employment in state agencies, which are the largest employers in the country.

The government demonstrates adherence to human rights protection for PWDs through the development of inclusive policies. However, discrepancies continue to persist between legislation and ongoing initiatives and the daily realities faced by PWDs. Employers, as a rule, have limited interest in hiring PWDs, due to the prevailing perception that they are not qualified workers.

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<sup>17</sup> UNICEF Turkmenistan. *Early Childhood Situation Analysis, op.cit.*

Change has been slow, and PWD continue to face considerable barriers accessing quality professional education and meaningful jobs. A small number of specialized and subsidized enterprises have been created for PWDs and remain the only accessible workplaces. In addition, there is a low level of interest among PWDs in seeking employment. This is largely due to limited skills and qualifications, low wages, and low levels of trust in the effectiveness of their work and in employers.

A centralized system of support for PWDs, including social protection and employment, is largely based on a system of benefit payments and compensation. The prevailing understanding of disability is the “medical approach”, and medical and employment commissions limit the choice of professions available to PWDs. Existing legislative norms regulate work hours, guaranteed vacation time, and other benefits, and though intended to serve as protection mechanisms, these policies in fact impose limitations on PWD efforts to realize their full potential, search for appropriate employment, and become economically and socially independent.

In Turkmenistan, quotas in the government procurement system designed to benefit those enterprises employing PWDs have been cancelled, reducing the ability of these enterprises to compete in current economic conditions. Reduced competitiveness can be attribute to a lack of professional skills among PWDs, and limited knowledge of business processes, networks, marketing strategies, etc. Equipment in a number of such enterprises has lapsed into obsolescence, further reducing their competitiveness and, subsequently, limiting opportunities for stable employment for PWDs.

### 3. INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AND EFFECTIVE TOOLS AND MECHANISMS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Presented below are best practices previously or currently implemented in Central Asia and Azerbaijan to address challenges faced by PWDs through public participation. CAFP experts recommend further study and adoption of these practices in target countries through collaborative initiatives.

#### *External Advisors on PWD Issues*

The institution of external advisors on disability rights protection to Ministries and regional or local governments (*akimats*) has proven to be an effective instrument for the resolution of PWD issue. The advisory mechanism was approved and adopted by the government of Kazakhstan following advocacy from PWD organizations. As of May 2017, 37 people with disabilities were engaged as advisors. The best examples of the effectiveness of the advisor institution demonstrate that full-fledged participation of PWDs in the events, programs, and decision-making and budget-planning processes of Ministries and regional, district, and local governments results in greater representation and reflection of the interests of PWDs in development strategies and documents. Advisors are asked to address the following issues:

- Promotion of the practical implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the national and local levels;
- Awareness-raising and support for the implementation of national disability rights policy through engagement with PWD organizations;
- Development of comprehensive solutions to issues faced by PWDs;
- Provision of feedback and promotion of the interests of PWDs in meetings and events with government agencies.

A CSO initiative led to the creation of a virtual School of Advisors, which provides advisors with online training on key issues related to PWDs. The dissemination of the advisory model to other countries in the region would represent a significant step in the promotion of the interests of PWDS.

#### *Coordination Councils*

Coordination councils created to address issues of social protection for PWDs in Kazakhstan serve as an effective platform for leaders of PWD organizations (60% of the total number) to raise questions and concerns and share recommendations. Leaders of PWD organization also serve in public councils under local and regional *akimats*, which serve as an additional forum for the discussion of PWD interests. In Kyrgyzstan, leaders of PWD organizations work directly with government authorities at all levels to develop solutions to PWD challenges. Open dialogue between the government and the civil sector is Kyrgyzstan's "calling card", as the country has been successful promoting a range of PWD representatives in local government agencies.

#### *Alternative Reporting*

In Spring 2017, more than 15 representatives of public organizations for PWDS in Kazakhstan, including those promoting the rights of people with musculoskeletal disabilities, vision and hearing impairments, and mental disorders, received training in the basic process of developing an alternative report for the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The training

generated considerable interest among participants, and included a theoretical framework as well as a number of practical components in the writing of the alternative report. However, due to short deadlines and a lack of sufficient knowledge and skills to fully address the issue, systemize the process, or present the results, a single report has yet to be developed.

Review of Kazakhstan's primary report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is currently planned for fall 2018, with the possibility of extension to a later date. CSO representatives therefore have the opportunity to increase their capacity, and prepare and present an alternative report in time to meet the later deadline. The experience of CSOs in Azerbaijan can serve as an example for other countries in the region; since ratification of the CRPD, Azerbaijani organizations have coordinated effectively to write alternative reports for the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Thus, regional CSO training is needed on the preparation of public/alternative reports for the UN Committee, as well as to promote capacity-building for PWD organizations in analysis and monitoring of CRPD implementation, as demonstrated in Azerbaijan.

### ***Active Youth Engagement***

Active engagement with youth is important for shifting public opinion about PWDs and for the development of inclusive communities. Each country needs a unified policy for mobilizing youth, including youth with disabilities. In Azerbaijan, for example, this type of work has been ongoing since 1995. On September 15, 2017, the nation's president approved a new government program, entitled "Youth of Azerbaijan, 2017-2021". The program strengthens volunteerism, particularly for international sports tournaments in Baku, such as the European Games, the Islamic Solidarity Games, Formula 1 Racing, and others.

Effective work with youth requires innovative approaches, including, for example, interactive games and flash mobs. These activities also require the support of creative young people, tasked with the development of innovative solutions to the barriers faced by people with disabilities (for example, "Makeathon" projects). Youth organizations in countries throughout the region are raising awareness about issues faced by PWDS through flash mobs; in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, flash mobs have even included representatives of government agencies.

### ***"TOM" (Tikkun-Olam-Makers)***

In two cities in Kazakhstan, international social projects, called "TOM" (Tikkun-Olam-Makers) bring inventors and people with special needs together to develop technology which compensates for physical limitations. During marathon "maker" sessions, PWDs, or "Need Knowers", design prototypes which are convenient to use and simple to produce, at an accessible price, which aim to help PWDs navigate the world and enjoy full lives.

PreTOM is the prototype development phase, and includes a meeting between PWDs and makers in which both groups collaborate to develop solutions to existing problems faced by PWDs and discuss opportunities for implementation. PreTOM teams brainstorm initial ideas, which could include, for example, for new mobility concepts, technology for communications, etc. The PreTOM phase allows teams to gain a deeper understanding of existing needs and develop designs for prototyping over the course of one month.

TOM is the makeathon itself – 72-hours of continuous work on the prototype. The team defends the design in front of a jury, and the best ideas are recognized and awarded.

PostTOM is the final phase, in which all project designs are made available through an open-source platform, [projects.tomglobal.org](http://projects.tomglobal.org), allowing any internet user to access the technical specifications and pursue further development and use of the concepts.

Similar makeathons have been held since 2014 in the US, Argentina, the UK, Brazil, Israel, Canada, Vietnam, and Australia. In Kazakhstan, the concept is promoted by the vice-President of the Association of Friends of Tel Aviv University in Kazakhstan, Saniya Arapova: “We created this platform for people with disabilities to be heard. Many of their problems have yet to be solved, but could be. It is very important that here we change mindsets. The social awareness of youth people literally grows through such forums.”

One such TOM event was held at Toraigyrov Pavlodar State University. “Only by working together with governmental, scientific, and engineering communities can we create meaningful conditions for people with disabilities, not only in Kazakhstan, but in the world,” noted rector Nurlan Yerzhanov. The approach is likewise unique in that it presents opportunities to commercialize ideas and create a self-sustaining social business. Increased government support could be used to connect TOM teams with manufacturers, as well as to finance scale-up of prototypes and introduction into the market.

### ***Camps for Independent Living***

Stakeholders in all target countries indicated that more opportunities are needed for PWDs, including those which reduce and psychological barriers. In this regard, camps for independent living in Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan serve as a positive example. For seven days, girls and women with disabilities, including those in wheelchairs, leave the confines of their homes say goodbye to their parents and caregivers. All participants are challenged to actively participate in all of the camp’s activities, and independently resolve the daily difficulties of mobility without external assistance. At camp, participants have the opportunity to develop their own projects, and the week culminates in a final flash mob. The camps contribute to a psychological shift among participants, and a greater awareness of their ability to live independent lives and challenges stereotypes and biases in society. Similar events could be held in all countries of the regions as pilot projects, with the potential for eventual scale-up and inclusion in state PWD support programs.

### ***Use of Social Media Networks***

Throughout Central Asia and Azerbaijan, online social media networks have become some of the most popular communication vehicles for people of all ages, and currently serve as active platforms for discussion and planning around key issues faced by PWDs. PWDs regularly use social networks and often consider them to be one of the most accessible forums for speaking about themselves and countering stereotypes and myths about PWDs as passive or “outsider” members of the community. One of the most notable examples of PWD advocacy through online social networks is the work of Almas Yerzhan in Kazakhstan. He began to raise issues of access and support for entrepreneurs with disabilities and other issues relevant to the PWD community through analytical writing, attracting a broad audience of online followers.<sup>18</sup> What started online also gained momentum offline; Almas Yerzhan became an advisor to the holding company “Baiterek” and also holds speaking events with students at Nazarbayev University.

Online, all users are equal, which has contributed to the active online presence of PWDs. No one sees or judges physical appearance, which reduces insecurities, lowers barriers, and allows users to be uniquely themselves. Online engagement has become a form of socialization and an entry point

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<sup>18</sup> [https://forbes.kz/process/appointments/kolyasochnik\\_almaz\\_erjan\\_stal\\_sovetnikom\\_holdinga\\_bayterek](https://forbes.kz/process/appointments/kolyasochnik_almaz_erjan_stal_sovetnikom_holdinga_bayterek)

to the wider community for PWDs. At the same time, it is important to note that while an active only presence is a positive step forward, online platforms should serve as a tool to supplement – and not replace – active participation in community life for PWDs.

Initiatives which foster active and effective use of online networks by PWD activists and leaders show considerable potential for awareness-raising and positive offline impact.



## 4. COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGION

Target countries each have their own experience supporting disability rights in their individual contexts. A number of countries have a strong legislative framework, yet incomplete implementation. In other countries, the situation has improved as a result of ratification of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, yet there is much work to be done to ensure that PWD rights are fully protected and represented in decision-making processes. Within the region, a number of priority areas for projects and initiatives have emerged. The multifaceted nature of the issues faced by PWDs requires joint initiatives and partnerships to ensure that diverse needs are addressed. Partnerships can take the form of resource and experience exchange, or collaboration in the organization of joint activities and services.

It is important to disseminate best practices developed in the region to neighboring countries, which share similar challenges and cultural contexts. For example, promotion of the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Kyrgyzstan can serve as a regional example, as can Azerbaijan's experience with the development of alternative CRPD reports and Kazakhstan's experience with the development of PWD advisor mechanism for government agencies.

During the course of this study, focus group participants developed recommendations for each country; presented here are key findings from the research. Each section can be translated into one or more project ideas for joint initiatives in the region.

### ***CRPD Ratification and Impact***

At the time of this study, not all Central Asian countries had ratified the Convention; analysis shows that ratification contributes to significant improvements in protection of disability rights. Promoting ratification and existing efforts to align policies and programs with the Convention's requirements can influence the decision of neighboring countries to adopt the Convention. The regional leaders in CRPD compliance through national legislation are Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

Countries which ratified the CRPD are required to create a national-level monitoring mechanism, according to Article 33 of the Convention; none of the target countries in the region have established a mechanism to date. This mechanism would serve as an important accountability tool in target countries, as well as play an important role in leveraging the momentum of achievements to date in the promotion of disability rights. Further study is needed on the international experience of alternative reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The CRPD serves as the foundation for the development of a human-rights based approach to PWD issues. It is therefore critical to conduct awareness-raising activities in ratified countries for civil servants (primarily in medical and educational institutions) and the broader public, including through information campaigns, seminars, and trainings.

### ***Alignment with Relevant National Legislation***

Successful implementation of the laws and provisions promoted through the CRPD requires additional support. Important forms of support should include legislation for those government agencies responsible for the identification of strategic priorities related to PWD rights, strengthened

interagency coordination, and alignment of national law and policies with CRPD requirements. A legal definition of ‘disability’ based on the human-rights framework is also needed – a definition based on rights, social integration, and the expansion of opportunities for families and children, is also needed.

### ***Public Monitoring of the Rights of People with Disabilities***

Community organizations operating in the region need greater technical knowledge and skills to monitor compliance of disability rights in accordance with the parameters of the Convention.

### ***Support for PWD Employment***

Successful integration of PWDs requires adaptation programs or internships in the workplace. This could start with a series of seminars for PWDs and employers, during which they would define disability, search for employment opportunities, write and submit resumes, participate in interviews, and learn about the laws which protect PWDs. Additionally, an information campaign designed to break stereotypes could target employers, emphasizing the skills and abilities of PWDs.

Notable in the region is the experience of the Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network (ASAN) under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which has developed and adopted best practices in the work place for PWDs; these have variously included the creation of jobs, hiring PWDs on staff, and finding markets for handicrafts, among other approaches.

In the near future, Centers of Professional Orientation and job coaching will be in high demand in all countries in the region. It is important for PWDs to develop the skills needed for effective employment and leadership. Additional supports could include job fairs for PWDs and the creation of an online database of vacancies for use by both employers and job-seekers with disabilities.

### ***Support for the Development of Entrepreneurship among PWDs***

To foster independence among PWDs, it is important for governments to support new entrepreneurs with disabilities in the process of planning, launching, and sustaining small businesses. In a number of countries, programs exist to support new business owners, but a targeted support program is needed to train, support, and finance PWDs on special terms.

### ***Raising Public Awareness***

A high level of public awareness about the needs and interests of PWDs is a prerequisite for the effective integration of PWDs. A targeted information campaign should seek to shift public perceptions and stereotypes away from the ‘medical model’ of disability towards the ‘social’ or ‘human rights-based’ model. Such a PR campaign should target specific social groups to maximize public awareness. The experience of community organizations shows that flash mobs and public events increase the level of awareness within the community, including, notably, among civil servants and other government authorities. In addition, these approaches have proven to be particularly effective among youth. Information and awareness-raising campaigns should also engage parents of children without disabilities, in order to reduce existing prejudice against children with disabilities.

State media should inform PWDs and the broader public about various opportunities for PWDs to actively and independently participate in community life; private media outlets will increase their coverage of these activities accordingly.

One example of a coordinated awareness-raising event designed to overcome existing stereotypes about PWDs is Kyrgyzstan's "Walking Marathon" for PWDs in Issykul, and any other location accessible to PWDs. Such highly-visibility events spark public dialogue about the popular understanding of disabilities within communities. Kazakhstan also presents a range of positive examples for raising community awareness through information campaigns, including through events such as the "Different and Equal" competitions for best student, best poet, best dancer, etc., "Question and Answer" sessions for the public to ask questions of Members of Parliament, and the "Orleu" Prize to recognize community contributions, among others.

#### ***Private Sector Outreach to Address PWD Issues***

The business sector, particularly in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, is steadily growing, and seeks to increase its visibility as sector while establishing a reputation for its brands. For these reasons, targeted outreach is needed with this sector in order to raise awareness among private businesses regarding the potential of PWDs as a client base. By extension, businesses need to provide adapted toilets, facilities, and sales infrastructure to meet the needs of PWDs, and train employees to provide high-quality services to clients with disabilities. There is also untapped potential to attract businesses to support the construction of rehabilitation centers, the development of products with "universal design" designations (for example, furniture and clothing adapted for PWDs), and support for PWD employment through preferential access to government contracting (2-3% for businesses would serve as a strong incentive). Greater outreach is needed for employers, in order to demonstrate the full potential of PWDs and their skills and knowledge, and to call for greater respect for PWDs as responsible and capable employees. Outreach would also serve to clarify existing legislative norms and policies regarding PWD employment. The focus must be shifted away from charity and towards respect for the individual, who is not defined by his or her disability.

In Kazakhstan, employment for PWDs will be subsidized starting in 2018. The program should be expanded to include internships for PWD in various sectors of the economy, including in government, business, and community agencies and organizations. Such initiatives should be supplemented by online informational resources which target businesses and encourage informed hiring of PWDs. The process of involving the private sector into career orientation and professional training activities for PWDs should be based on best practices adapted from Europe and the US. New approaches to inclusive education (currently an unexplored niche for private business) should be presented to the government.

#### ***Strengthening Monitoring of Disability Rights***

A comprehensive system for the public to monitor implementation legislation and mechanisms of influence remains of critical importance – additional accountability can be leveraged to enforce legislation. For example, Kyrgyzstan's law "On the Rights Guaranteed to People with Special Health Needs" establishes firm policies, yet is largely unenforced. In addition, stronger monitoring of building codes and policies related to PWD access is needed in countries throughout the region.

#### ***Development of an Accessible Environment***

A physical environment without barriers is an indicator of the sustainable development of a community. Conditions for the mobility of PWDs must be provided; despite the construction of new facilities and roads in cities, existing infrastructure is inadequate. The development of 'accessibility maps' of cities for PWDs and other citizens with limited mobility can contribute to greater participation in community life, encouraging visits to theaters and museums, engagement in sports activities, and the pursuit of quality education – all opportunities which support self-realization and personal fulfillment.

Note, advocacy activities for the creation of more accessible environments for PWDs must differentiate for the diversity of disabilities and mobility issues which require adaptation. The development of accessible communities for PWDs and limited-mobility citizens represents an important step towards full respect for and protection of the rights of CWD and PWDs.

### ***Personal Development of PWDs***

Meeting the diverse needs of PWDs is a priority in developed countries. At the same time, government programs must also consider methods for reducing the sense of dependency among PWDs. Employment, active engagement in entrepreneurial activities, and measures designed to foster inclusion of PWDs into the work force effectively reduce feelings dependency. It is likewise important to create conditions and opportunities to build self-confidence among PWDs.

Specific activities and support services should be designed with the explicit purpose of fostering personal development, leadership qualities, effective communication skills, and decision-making skills among PWDs. Initiatives which reduce psychological barriers, increase confidence, and lead to the acquisition of practical new skills (through, for example, trainings and camps for independent living) encourage greater participation in public life. These efforts must be paired with activities to strengthen legal literacy among PWDs, ensuring that they are adequately equipped to advocate for their rights, demand quality service provision, and pursue free and equal participation in public life. One notable motivator for some PWDs has been the Paralympic Games for both CWDs and PWDs. Notably, Azerbaijan led the creation of a children's Paralympic Committee for Central Asia.

### ***Inclusive Education***

The issue of inclusive education at all levels (pre-school, home school, primary and secondary school, higher education, and professional training) has a direct impact on one's ability to live a life of one's choosing. National organizations representing PWDs are currently engaged in dialogue to resolve issues of access and inclusion. At present, support centers for students with disabilities at educational institutions which serve both students and teachers are practically unknown. There are not enough qualified teachers, adapted resource materials, or technical equipment to meet the need of PWDs in educational institutions (audio/video equipment, textbooks for the sight-impaired, etc.). People with disabilities have the right to education in an inclusive system, yet effective integration into standard schools will require elimination of existing legal barriers which hinder access to education, as well as the development of an educational curriculum which allows people with disabilities to be educated with their peers. Recommendations for addressing these and other issues envision inclusive education as an integral part of the educational curriculum for teachers in schools and universities. Current teachers need mandatory training on working effectively with students with disabilities, tailoring curricula to meet the needs of all students, and encouraging open dialogue about PWD issues in the classroom. Inclusivity can also be fostered through initiatives designed to transform schools into places that are friendly and welcoming for students with disabilities and respect the rights of all children to receive an education in a standard school.

### ***Engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)***

The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in increasing civic participation of PWDs cannot be overstated. Regional experience shows that CSOs can serve as intermediaries between governments and citizens with disabilities. They can successfully adopt innovative approaches to foster a "positive" image of PWDs and challenge the stereotypes not only of PWDs, but of all social groups, and contributing to the development of an inclusive society as a whole. CSOs need to work with a high level of professionalism with government agencies and be well-versed in national policies and legislation. To this end, it is important for CSOs to develop their capacity to address issues faced by

PWDs in the region, as well as work in close partnership with government agencies to effectively address issues at the policy level. Governments currently recognize the critical role public organizations play in protecting disability rights and advocating for more accessible physical environments for PWDs. CSOs in Kyrgyzstan, in particular, have demonstrated success in working directly with government officials at all levels to protect the interests of PWDs.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research results revealed the current status of access, education, public opinion, political participation, employment, and other rights of PWDs in each country of the region. Variation can be observed across all countries. Lack of access to detailed information prevented the development of detailed descriptions by theme for each country. The recommendations below are based on general findings applicable to all target countries, and allow for the identification of key areas of focus.

**Promotion of the Convention and its Implementation.** Countries across the world are undergoing transformations as they consider the concepts of well-being, participation, equality of PWDs, and accessible environments. The “medical model” conceptualizes disability as an individual’s health problems, and not as problems created by society in the form of social barriers which prevent PWDs from full participation in all spheres of public life (education, culture, employment, politics, etc.), as defined by the Convention. People with disabilities are frequently seen as victims in need of social protection, and not as actors with a full range of rights equal to those of any other citizen. On the other hand, isolation, years of limited interactions, self-pity, and other internal barriers experienced by PWDs are further compounded by lack of awareness of their rights and the provisions of the Convention, contributing to the persistence of the medical model. At times, the positive measures taken by some governments in an effort to meet the objectives of the Convention and its provisions fail to achieve their desired outcomes among PWDs. Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has led to positive changes in public life in target countries. Several countries, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, have already modified national legislation to align with the provisions of the Convention. Other countries would do well to address such legal and policy issues as soon as possible.

**Recommendation 1.** *Provide technical support for civic initiatives to promote the Convention, for a human-rights-based approach to disability, and for data collection and analysis on PWDs, through dialogue platforms which bring key stakeholders together, including representatives of government agencies, Members of Parliament, national human rights institutions, experts from other countries, and members of the Secretariat of the Convention.*

**Recommendation 2.** *Strengthen the technical capacity of NGOs, including PWD organizations, experts, coalitions, and networks of PWDs monitoring CRPD implementation, writing alternative reports, and using advocacy tools in innovative ways, including through social media.*

**Civic and public participation for PWDs.** In the course of ongoing dialogue with government agencies, the development and adoption of instruments and mechanisms for PWD participation in decision-making processes at all levels (from local to national) is critical. The region suffers from an insufficient number of civil society leaders representing the interests and rights of PWDs, thus targeted capacity building has the potential to shape PWDs into political leaders.

**Recommendation 3.** *Support PWD activities which promote engagement and adoption of best practices and acquired experience, such as the institute of external advisors, coordination councils, various consultation bodies operating under the national government, and capacity building in the areas of policy-making and election technology.*

**NGO Engagement in Central Asia and Azerbaijan.** The current situation in the target region demonstrates the potential of N

**Recommendation 4.** *Facilitate exchange of best practices, experiences, and knowledge between countries in order to promote joint initiatives and projects, as well as to identify key national experts for participation in projects in other countries. Additional attention should be given to potential joint initiatives described in the research results.*

**Community Awareness of Disability.** According to experts, the general level of understanding about the concept of disability and disability right is gradually improving. Yet the need for greater awareness among the general population remains high. During the course of the study, researchers determined that online social networks (*Facebook, Twitter, VKontakte, Instagram, Odnoklassniki*) are becoming active platforms for addressing key issues faced by PWDs. Social networks are becoming one of the most popular communication vehicles for people of all ages. PWDs regularly use social networks and often consider them to be one of the most accessible forums for speaking about themselves and countering stereotypes and myths about PWDs as passive members of the community. Various models for social engagement have become popular in contemporary society (makeathons (TOM), flash mobs, marathons, camps for independent living, and others), and citizens, including PWDs, are becoming actively involved in disability rights issues.

**Recommendation 5.** *Develop activities to inform and involve citizens in the creation of an inclusive society using innovative approaches, and social technologies and information channels, including social networks, mobile applications, etc., especially those used in the countries of the region (described in the research results).*

**Employment of People with Disabilities.** In target countries, the issues of employment and self-employment for PWDs have gained considerable attention, and a range of employment formats and approaches to job support for PWDs have emerged to discourage passivity and dependency. Information campaigns designed to overcome employer and community stereotypes are gaining visibility and continue to remain relevant. However, coordination between civil society and the business sector remains weak.

**Recommendation 6.** *Develop a system to support employment, professional orientation centers and job coaching, social entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship among PWDs, which could support full employment for people with disabilities in the labor market.*

**Recommendation 7.** *Support initiatives and partnerships between NGOs and the business sector for the promotion of Disability Inclusive Business and Universal Design.*

**Active Participation of PWD in public life.** Measures for supporting PWD are an important part of developing an inclusive society. At the same time, an important condition for inclusion is the socialization of PWDs and their active participation in public life. Society has long ignored the issues faced by people with disabilities, which has contributed to today's current attitudes of dependency, fear of the public, and lack of confidence in one's own ability felt among the majority of PWDs.

**Recommendation 8.** *Support initiatives for active engagement of PWDs in public life through opportunities for personal development (camps for independent living), work with youth, support for the initiatives of PWDs themselves (TOM, flash mobs), as well as the development of projects which foster inclusion. At the same time, greater attention must be paid to innovative approaches, mechanisms, and strategic directions for partnership initiatives described in this report.*

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in spring 2017 by experts from the Central Asian Forum of People with Disabilities (*Kazakhstan*), with participation from national organizations, including the Union of Organizations of People with Disabilities (*Azerbaijan*), the “Equality” Union of People with Disabilities of Issykul Oblast (*Kyrgyzstan*), “Kishti” Center (*Tajikistan*), and CSO “Enme” (*Turkmenistan*).

### Research Goal

To identify the current status of disability rights in countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan and develop recommendations for civil society organizations (CSOs) on effective strategies, innovative approaches, and implementation mechanisms to promote the rights of people with disabilities (PWDs).

### Research Target Groups

- Kazakhstan: women and men with disabilities, government agencies, CSOs
- Kyrgyzstan: women and men with disabilities, government agencies, CSOs
- Tajikistan: children/women/men with disabilities, government agencies, CSOs
- Turkmenistan: women and men with disabilities, government agencies, CSOs
- Azerbaijan: women and men with disabilities, government agencies, CSOs

### Research Questions

1. Which changes have occurred in the policies and legislation of Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan in the sphere of disability rights?
2. What is the current situation in target countries, including achievements and notable results, as well as key conclusions and lessons learned, related to the promotion of disability rights?
3. Which strategies, innovative approaches, and mechanisms have been the most effective in current conditions?
4. Which tools for public participation, advocacy, and dialogue with the government can be used to strengthen CSO engagement in Central Asia and Azerbaijan to promote the rights of PWDs?
5. Which disability rights initiatives can be implemented by two or more countries in the region?

### Research Methods and Approaches

The study examined legal, social, economic, and other aspects of the daily lives of PWDs in target countries, based on information provided by PWDs themselves, as well as from the perspectives of key experts in the regions recorded during the selected time period (*three years*). The study built upon the results of previous research conducted in the region over the last three years. The goal of the study was not to describe all processes occurring in the region regarding PWDs, but instead to describe current tendencies in the development of government strategies to protect disability rights and the status quo of PWDs in the countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. In addition, the study seeks to identify tendencies, best practices, and innovations, which can be recommended as potential solutions for protecting the rights of PWDs, including through the development of joint initiatives.



In order to gain an accurate picture of the situation of people with disabilities in select Central Asia countries and Azerbaijan, the research team collected and analyzed information provided by key experts, including people with disabilities, representatives of government agencies, and civil society organizations working on disability rights issues; respondents included stakeholders working at the city, district, and national levels. The target group selection was based on incremental sampling. In-depth knowledge of and experience with disability rights issues were critical criteria for participation in the research study

The same research methods were used in all target countries, including:

**1) Desk Research**

Desk research was conducted directly by CAFD experts, based on analysis of previous research findings on disability rights conducted over the last three years. Findings were used from freely accessible sources and supplemented with information from partner organizations.

**2) Focus Groups in 5 Countries (5-8 participants each)**

2.1 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan

2.1.1 Women and/or men with disabilities

2.1.2 Representatives of CSOs working in the sphere of disability rights

2.2 Tajikistan:

2.2.1 Parents/caretakers of children with disabilities

2.2.2 Representatives of CSOs working in the sphere of disability rights

In each country, 2 focus groups were held (1-2 hours each), with 5-8 participants in each group. Focus groups were comprised of women and men with various disabilities or the parents/caretakers of children with disabilities (including vision/hearing impairments or physical mobility challenges) of all ages, representing both cities and rural areas.

**3) In-depth Interviews with Representatives of Key Government Agencies** (3-4 representatives from each country), including representatives of national Ministries of Labor and Social Protection, Ministries of Education, Ministries of Public Health, and the Offices of the Ombudsmen for Human Rights in the countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan (Baku), Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek, Karakol), Tajikistan (Dushanbe), and Turkmenistan (Ashgabad), focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted through partner organizations, each with extensive experience working with PWD issues. In Kazakhstan, focus groups were conducted by representatives from CAFD (Almaty, Astana).