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Improving the system of social protection through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services

Government of Turkmenistan - United Nations Joint Programme



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TURKMENISTAN



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Foreword

As the Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of Turkmenistan and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan we are pleased to introduce this overview of the Joint Programme of the Government of Turkmenistan and the United Nations to introduce inclusive quality community-based social services in the country.

The Joint Programme has achieved a great deal in the two years of realization. A new Law on Social Services has been passed and a set of normative acts have been developed, with secondary regulations developed to support implementation of each service. There are now social workers paid by and working for government ministries in Turkmenistan. Social workers and allied social care professionals have been trained across multiple areas of support (including hands-on training). And – most importantly – many of the most vulnerable in Turkmenistan’s society have already directly benefited from the social services provided.

Despite the challenges associated with the global pandemic, we have been able to see successes. New ways of working have meant that even when physical meetings were not possible, learning was sustained in an ongoing basis through innovative remote working.

The Joint Programme has also had a range of other benefits. These include broader understanding about the needs of various population groups in Turkmenistan, and increased use of evidence from the ground in decision making. The close work for the project between sectors – between various UN agencies, between government ministries and between the UN and the government – can serve as a good example for other countries in the region and further afield.

In closing, we would like to express our profound appreciation for our partners, the newly trained and deployed social workers and social carers who are continuing to work tirelessly for the wellbeing of the people of Turkmenistan.

Muhammet Sylapov

Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Population of Turkmenistan

Dmitry Shlapachenko

UN Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan

Introduction

This publication reviews the achievements of “Improving the system of social protection through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services”, a United Nations Joint Programme funded by the Joint SDG Fund, and implemented by United Nations agencies in Turkmenistan – UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UNODC – and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Turkmenistan. Initially planned as a two-year Joint Programme from January 2020-January 2022, because of delays arising as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Programme was extended to June 2022.

The context of Turkmenistan

The right to social protection of every citizen is safeguarded in the Constitution of Turkmenistan. The rights to dignity, to live an independent life in the community to the best of your ability and to be protected from violence are safeguarded in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), the Rights of Children (CRC) and the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Before the Joint Programme, the Code on Social Protection in Turkmenistan regulated social services just for adults with disabilities and older people. The system focused more on beneficiaries’ perceived lack of capacity to satisfy their basic needs, rather than adopting a rights-based approach to empower service-users to live independently.

Essentially, the social protection system mainly provides cash benefits, residential care

and limited non-residential care services available to a small number of adults with disabilities and older people, though Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) territorial social assistance centres in six cities. Some civil society organizations (CSOs) also provide limited material support and other services to persons with disabilities, women experiencing violence and advisory services to single parents or couples in divorce proceedings.

The country has largely relied on extended family to support vulnerable people, including children without parental care, and provide basic care to people in need, resolving conflict situations within the family and incidents that include use of violence against women, children and elderly people with women carrying a disproportionately large load of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities. Additional pressure on these traditional, informal family support systems – resulting from economic and other social changes – made children, people with disabilities, women and older people increasingly vulnerable to abandonment, neglect, abuse and violence.

Some children and elderly people living alone were entering residential care (including children entering infant homes, children’s homes or residential care for children with disabilities, or adults with disabilities or elderly people living alone) because of the lack of services to support families and individuals in difficult circumstances at community level. On a day-to-day basis, residential care and cash benefits do not resolve many of the social issues faced by vulnerable populations.

To a large extent, the system of social protection effectively widened the separation between vulnerable groups and the wider population. Social exclusion was a major issue, particularly for children and adults with disabilities, young people at risk, women experiencing violence, and for elderly persons living alone. Families with members with alcohol or other dependencies needed support, and there was little awareness of violence in the home. All of these vulnerabilities, including the low-level of well-being of individual families were not fully addressed. Other elements of a formal system of social services – such as information provision, individual needs assessment, referral procedures, requirements and standards for provision of services, guaranteed public funding and a social work workforce – were missing.



An inventory of existing social services conducted by survey as part of the Joint Programme in 2021 further highlighted the lack of essential social services in the country. Analysis of the results found that around 6,000 people (about 0.01 per cent of the population)¹ were receiving government-provided social care in the country, with most of these – both adults and children – living in residential care. Official governmental data from 2019 indicated that around 5,230 children (210 per 100,000 child population)² lived in various types of residential institutions, of whom the majority were children with disabilities. Only 1,985 adults were receiving home-visit and day-care social support from the six MLSP territorial social assistance centres in 2019.³ The needs of other vulnerable groups in the population were not taken into account, and social services were not provided for them.

Cognizant of these challenges, the Government of Turkmenistan has prioritized improving social services in its mid-term national development programme and human rights action plans. In particular, the National Programme of the President of Turkmenistan on socio-economic development for 2019-2025 has the key aim of improving the quality of social services.

1 Inventory of Social Services, Joint Programme/UNDP, 2020
2 Government of Turkmenistan State Committee for Statistics, 2021
3 Inventory of Social Services, Joint Programme/UNDP, 2020

The government intends to make a transformative change in the current system of social service delivery, and to achieve national priorities aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the international conventions on children, persons with disabilities and women's rights.

Goals we are supporting through this initiative



The Joint Programme

To support the government's endeavour, the United Nations has been building the capacity of both state institutions (with the MLSP as the lead partner) and national CSOs for social service provision. In 2019, the first ever Government of Turkmenistan-UN Joint Programme on social services was approved for 2020-2022.

The Joint Programme is intended to ensure that all vulnerable populations (including children at risk of separation from parents, children without parental care, children with disabilities, youth at risk, women experiencing gender-based violence, adults with disabilities, older persons living alone, and others in need of support with basic everyday care) have access to quality, community-based social services provided by professional social workers and qualified social service providers to address their individual needs and ensure their social inclusion. Social inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to services and resources as well as enable citizen's participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

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