

“Discrimination in education for PWD (persons with disabilities) begins from childhood: very often the administrations of educational institutions refuse to enroll children due to the lack of proper training of teachers and the unsuitability of buildings. TV programs with sign language translation are often not broadcast in the media, and in general, there are practically no modern educational materials for PWD,” says Kalys Meymanbekova (Kyrgyzstan), a member of the CABAR.asia school of analytics.

De jure in Kyrgyzstan, persons with disabilities (PWDs) are not limited in their rights and are not infringed on their abilities. However, in practice, norms and laws do not work with regard to the social integration of persons with disabilities. In general, the situation with the education of PWDs is very unfavorable in the country, they are almost not participants in the educational system, although many of them want to study, but due to the lack of proper infrastructure, education for PWDs in Kyrgyzstan remains inaccessible.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the current state of accessibility of inclusive education for persons with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan. Inclusive education is understood as an activity to increase diversity and develop a sense of belonging, based on the fact that each person is valuable and has the potential for development.

Among the countries of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan occupies one of the last places in the development of the inclusive education sector and in terms of infrastructure, slightly ahead of Tajikistan. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report (2021), only 8% of schools in Kyrgyzstan have the infrastructure necessary for children with disabilities.

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, state programs are being implemented to support the education and science sector as a whole, with a special focus on providing higher wages, a social package and an attractive bonus system. The provision of teaching aids and equipment in educational institutions in these republics is also at a better level. However, the level of training of specialists in all countries of Central Asia is approximately the same, except for teachers in certain subject areas such as programming, natural sciences. Kazakhstan is leading in these subject areas, as a result of the implementation of the Bolashak state program.

Declarative nature of inclusion in Kyrgyzstan

There is not a single state program in the Kyrgyz Republic, independent of international donors, aimed at the development of social spheres - medicine, education or social

protection, financed only at the expense of the state. Support for teachers is equal to support for other state and municipal employees in terms of providing affordable housing, but this support is not available to 85% of needy employees.

Due to political and economic reasons, formal and declarative inclusion still exists in Kyrgyzstan today. Children with disabilities are admitted to general education schools without psychological and pedagogical diagnostics, without preparing participants in the educational process, without creating conditions for inclusion, i.e., without considering their individuality, capabilities, a national system of monitoring studies of the quality of education has not been formed, when the accreditation of schools is of a formal nature.

As a result, the quality of education in schools is poor, socialization is poor, and the mental and physical health of children with disabilities and other participants in the educational process is impaired. The priority direction in teaching children with disabilities today in Kyrgyzstan is the introduction of individual home-based education, which has largely become a new form of hidden segregation: the mechanisms for the participation of the child in the life of the school, their communication with peers, and social adaptation are not implemented.

According to a 2020 study by Human Rights Watch, an obstacle to inclusive education in Kyrgyzstan is the lack of physical access to mainstream schools, which in turn constitutes discrimination. According to Article 3 of the Law “On Education of the Kyrgyz Republic”, the right of every person is guaranteed, regardless of gender, nationality, language, social and property status ... health limitations ... and other circumstances.” In reality, people with disabilities face difficulties in implementing this law.

Moreover, in 2019, Kyrgyzstan ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the concept of development of inclusive education in Kyrgyzstan, its main goal is to create a holistic, effective education system and a national model for the inclusion of people with special educational needs in the educational process. According to the Convention, its implementation should ensure equal access to education for all students with different educational needs and improve the quality of education in general. The main value of inclusive education is “changing the attitude of society towards students with different educational needs.” During the introduction of inclusive education, in relation to students with disabilities, the medical approach, which considers disability as a deviation, illness, defect, is replaced by the approach of bio-socio-cultural diversity.

Despite the ongoing work, the following problems still exist, such as the stigmatization of

people with disabilities, the lack of specialists to help the inclusion of students with people with disabilities in education, poor training, the inadequacy of the infrastructure of educational institutions, as well as regulatory and legal barriers to access to education.

In the same year, the Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education in Kyrgyzstan for 2019-2023 was approved, which involves the realization of the rights of every child to receive education.

Thus, in theory, Kyrgyzstan is responsible for ensuring the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, including access to education at the system level.

Problems of inclusive education

According to the National Statistical Committee, as of January 1, 2021, there were about 198,000 people with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan, or about 3% of the total population. Of these, 165 thousand were adults, and children with disabilities - 32 thousand. Unfortunately, these figures are growing from year to year, and according to the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration, in recent years there has been an annual increase in the number of people with disabilities in the country.

Currently, 14 specialized pre-school educational and 18 specialized general educational organizations operate in the republic in order to educate children with disabilities. However, an independent study by Human Rights Watch found that children in these institutions are subject to discrimination and violence.

According to the preamble of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "discrimination against any person on the basis of disability constitutes an infringement of dignity and worth." Under the Convention, States parties undertake to "ensure and promote" the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Article 24 clearly states that the rights of persons with disabilities to education and the provision by States Parties of inclusive education at all levels. Today, the relevant law on education does not contain a definition of inclusive education and measures to provide alternative ways of communication within the educational process. There is also no obligation to encourage the training of teachers in alternative methods, including measures to employ teachers with disabilities. In addition, it does not regulate access to assistive devices.

The education of children with disabilities is considered only in separate forms: special groups, classes or organizations for the purpose of treatment, education, training, social adaptation and integration into society.

The infrastructure of Kyrgyzstan, including transport throughout the country, educational institutions and medical institutions do not allow people with disabilities to move freely due to the lack of ramps, railings, etc.

In this regard, discrimination in education for people with disabilities begins from childhood: very often the administrations of educational institutions refuse to enroll children due to the lack of proper training of teachers and the unsuitability of buildings. TV programs with sign language interpretation are often not broadcast in the media, and in general, there are practically no modern educational materials for people with disabilities, for example, for the visually and hearing impaired.

Inclusive education implies the possibility of a full and versatile development of the individual. PWDs, learning with their peers at school and fully developing in the family, have more opportunities for further inclusion and participation in society. In addition, it includes the development of early intervention services, pre-school, school, as well as secondary vocational and higher vocational education. Unfortunately, many initiatives were adopted on paper, but are not implemented in practice.

According to the UNICEF report, in practice, general and special education are treated separately. In addition, people with disabilities are subject to segregation and their access to education depends on disability registration. Without a certificate of disability, children with disabilities cannot be enrolled in specialized educational institutions. Despite the existence of specialized institutions, over the past 25 years, program materials, didactic base and training courses have not changed. In many specialized schools, children live permanently and are separated from their families. The analysis revealed that existing services are not disability inclusive.

In the international arena, Kyrgyzstan acts as a country that has adopted all documents on the observance of the rights of people with disabilities, including inclusive education. However, in reality, inclusive education does not work primarily due to the lack of political will and the availability of proper infrastructure.

For the successful implementation of inclusive education, material and technical conditions, program and methodological conditions, social and pedagogical support of students, and personnel conditions are needed. Unfortunately, in Kyrgyzstan, the above is almost not represented.

What can be done to strengthen inclusiveness?

According to a 2021 UNICEF study, the older the respondent, the more likely they are to support disability segregation and believe that the home environment and education is the most suitable for people with disabilities. At the same time, parents of children without disabilities are worried about the “safety” of their children and believe that “an exam should be held that such children will not harm others if they study in public institutions. And if they cause harm, they must study separately.”

Most likely, this is due to the fact that a significant part of people do not have practical experience of interacting with people with disabilities, and for them, this category of people is “invisible”. In addition, unfortunately, in the media and social networks, people with disabilities are often presented as a category of citizens who cause pity and as a passive object of help. Given the importance of the role of the media in promoting inclusive education, a broad information campaign is needed to protect the rights of people with disabilities, including the right to receive education and highlight best and successful practices. It is also necessary to educate the society with examples of successful inclusion and break down stereotypes, discrimination and stigmatization about people with disabilities. For example, create reports where the main headliners and newsmakers are people with disabilities. The above will affect the successful implementation of inclusive education in the country and the successful interaction and inclusion of people with disabilities in society. This is due to the fact that ordinary citizens are strongly influenced by the media and social networks and the images of people with disabilities inspired by them, which often negatively affects the perception of people with disabilities in general.

Civil society is making every effort to promote inclusive education in Kyrgyzstan, however, joint efforts are needed to achieve results. First of all, we need sufficient funding for the educational system for people with disabilities. In addition, a broad information campaign is required to explain to citizens that people with disabilities are the same people who have special needs for access to education.

In general, inclusive education involves understanding it through a humanistic approach, which consists in a positive attitude towards the diversity of students and the perception of a special child not as a problem, but as an opportunity to enrich the joint learning of children. The term inclusive education should include all students. Inclusion is not only infrastructure, it is culture and values. We need to conduct a large information campaign in order to tell about the importance of an inclusive culture. Society needs to see inclusion in practice and that it is possible. Parents, caregivers, families and communities may be biased against certain groups of people because of their disability, making it difficult or even reversible to reform and introduce inclusive education. Therefore, the state should organize platforms for parents and communities where they could discuss their wishes and policies in

the field of inclusive education. In general, partnership is a key action to achieve inclusion.

It is also necessary to create an environment or conditions conducive to development: flexible training programs, materials adapted for this. Because inclusion implies not only the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the educational system, but the most important thing is the adaptation and flexibility of the program.

The school should act as a space for the child's socialization, which in the future will be an indicator of his success in life. The content of education must be adapted and special attention must be paid to social and emotional well-being. It is important to note the special role of teachers - they must be ready to teach all children and they need to be prepared for inclusion. Teachers need to give up the belief that some students are defective and incapable of learning.

To date, the Ministry of Education and Science has not fully developed a mechanism for assessing the level of socialization of children with disabilities by adolescence, and there is no psychological service in most schools.

Therefore, we consider it necessary to:

1. Develop and consolidate by state regulations the minimum requirements for equipping general educational institutions for children with disabilities.
2. Make an economic calculation of the cost of securing these requirements for each position. The implementation of the standard will require a revision of the standards for financing the education of children with disabilities in the context of an educational organization, the introduction of at least two additional rates of psychological and pedagogical support for 750 school students, a plan to introduce the rates of tutors, assistants to accompany children with disabilities in the staffing of general educational organizations
3. Establish the subject of procurement, the quantity and cost of purchased equipment and works to meet the requirements for the conditions of implementation for children with disabilities.

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