



The role of the Association of Persons with Disabilities in protecting persons with disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the establishment and activities of the Association of Persons with Disabilities, its role in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, as well as the current challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Uzbekistan and potential solutions to these issues.

Keywords:

Convention; Association of Persons with Disabilities; Public Oversight; Persons with Disabilities; Rights of Persons with Disabilities; UNICEF; Employment; Non-discrimination.

The Uzbekistan Association of Persons with Disabilities (UAPD) was established on February 21, 2018. It is considered a universal organization in the country, as it unites 41 public associations representing all types and forms of disabilities. This allows the Association to take into account the diverse interests of all categories of persons with disabilities and their organizations. The Association was founded on the initiative of disability organizations to consolidate and coordinate efforts in building an inclusive society and implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Because of its scale, the Association pursues major goals and fulfills a wide range of tasks, which can be categorized as follows:

1. In the Field of Public Oversight

Monitoring the implementation of regulatory and legal acts related to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and the development of civil society;

Assisting in ensuring an accessible environment and monitoring the implementation of legislation on barrier-free access;

Conducting research on disability-related issues;

Organizing public hearings and discussions on the protection of disability rights and civil society development;

Participating in the evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of social services provided to persons with disabilities.

2. In the Field of Disability Rights

Raising awareness in society, including at the family level, on disability issues and strengthening respect for the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities;

Increasing the capacity and empowerment of persons with disabilities;

Establishing training and educational centers on disability rights;

Organizing events and contests to promote inclusive society;

Enhancing legal literacy among people with disabilities;

Promoting a rights-based approach to disability issues;

Contributing to the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on disability;

Supporting the transition from a

medical model to a social and legal model of disability.

3. Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Raising public awareness about the objectives and essence of the CRPD;

Assisting in the implementation of the Convention in Uzbekistan;

Supporting the integration of the CRPD into the national legal system and law enforcement practice;

Exercising public control over the implementation of the Convention;

Preparing alternative (shadow) reports on the implementation of the CRPD;

Promoting international cooperation with global organizations working in the field of disability rights and civil society development;

Organizing and participating in international conferences, seminars, and training sessions;

Studying international experience in the protection of disability rights.

4. Advocacy for the Rights and Legal Interests of Persons with Disabilities

Assisting in the realization of social, economic, political, and cultural rights of persons with disabilities;

Supporting access to social services, recreation, and physical education;

Promoting inclusive education and access to learning opportunities;

Expanding employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including in the public sector;

Encouraging physical and sports activities among persons with disabilities;

Supporting the creation of centers for independent living;

Ensuring the dignity, independence, and freedom of choice of persons with disabilities;

Facilitating effective access to justice for persons with disabilities.

Cooperation with UNICEF

One of the Association's notable initiatives is its cooperation with UNICEF.

On October 19, 2023, the Association, in

collaboration with UNICEF, organized a seminar on implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Uzbekistan. The seminar concluded a series of training sessions conducted across Uzbekistan to strengthen the capacity of parent groups of children with disabilities and representatives of national and local disability organizations.

UNICEF Deputy Representative in Uzbekistan, Jeffrey Ijumba, emphasized during the seminar that meaningful and sustainable participation of persons with disabilities is crucial not only in disability-specific programs but in all development initiatives.

This partnership between UNICEF and the Association signifies an important step toward promoting disability rights and developing an inclusive society. The initiative forms part of the UN Joint Program "Transforming the Social Service Delivery System: Implementing a Human Rights-Based Approach for Children, Youth, and Women with Disabilities in Uzbekistan."

Between 2022 and 2023, the Association also organized training sessions in Namangan, Kokand, Bukhara, Samarkand, Nukus, and Tashkent, reaching nearly 200 representatives of disability organizations. During these sessions, parent groups and organizations received legal and advisory support regarding registration and sustainable institutional development. More than 40 representatives gained skills in effectively protecting disability rights at the national and local levels.

5. Employment and Economic Rights: Key Issues and Challenges

In 2025, the UAPD published a report highlighting achievements and ongoing challenges in employment for persons with disabilities.

Key problems identified include:

Absence of a Legal Ban on Disability-Based Discrimination at the Workplace

Although Article 42 of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities prohibits discrimination in employment, promotion, and working conditions, the Labor Code lacks a specific provision ensuring accountability for

violations. The Association therefore recommends introducing explicit anti-discrimination clauses and related administrative penalties.

Mandatory Medical Examinations

Articles 426 and 429 of the Labor Code require mandatory medical examinations before hiring and annually thereafter. The Association argues this constitutes indirect discrimination, as the rule applies only to persons with disabilities and discourages employers from hiring them. Therefore, it proposes removing these articles.

Ineffective Implementation of the 3% Employment Quota

Although legislation requires employers to allocate 3% of jobs for persons with disabilities, the quota is poorly enforced. There is insufficient state monitoring, low awareness among employers, and minimal penalties. In the public sector, less than 1% of employees are persons with disabilities, and only 2–3% of disabled graduates from universities (admitted under the 2% special quota) find employment.

The Association recommends establishing a national employment program for persons with disabilities, ensuring effective quota monitoring, and providing incentives for employers. It also suggests incorporating disability-inclusive employment compliance as a criterion in public procurement contracts.

Ineligibility for Unemployment Benefits

Currently, persons with disabilities are not recognized as eligible for unemployment benefits, which the Association deems discriminatory. It proposes amending Article 46 of the Law on Employment to include persons with disabilities (especially those of groups I and II) among eligible recipients. Additionally, it calls for Uzbekistan to ratify ILO Convention No. 159 on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities.

6. Legislative Initiatives and Government Collaboration

The Association actively advocates for legal reforms.

It proposed that representatives of disability organizations be included in state commissions responsible for accepting new

public and social infrastructure facilities. As a result, the Ministry of Construction and Housing and Communal Services has implemented this initiative, and the Association's chairperson, Oybek Isakov, was granted an electronic access key to the "State Construction Supervision" information system. The process of providing similar access to regional representatives is ongoing.

This measure ensures transparency and accountability in ensuring barrier-free access in construction and infrastructure development across the country.

Conclusion

The Uzbekistan Association of Persons with Disabilities plays a crucial role in advancing the rights, inclusion, and dignity of persons with disabilities. Through legal advocacy, public oversight, cooperation with international organizations such as UNICEF and the UN, and active participation in legislative reforms, the Association has become a leading force in promoting an inclusive and equitable society in Uzbekistan.

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