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## Optimal model of social policy to improve living standards and ensure the quality of life of the population (on the example of inclusive education)

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**Abstract.** This article examines the Kazakhstan's social policies aimed to the enhancement of the standard and quality of life of its population, using inclusive education as an example.

The provision of education to vulnerable groups is a key element of social policy in many countries. It is a vital factor in improving the comprehensive standard of living of the Kazakhstan population.

The article reviews previous research on the impact of social policy on access to education for vulnerable groups and its affecting living standards in Kazakhstan. It discusses the shift towards an inclusive social policy that provides social protection for all based on human rights, in accordance with ILO recommendations No. 202, and standards of accessibility, adaptability, acceptability, and gender sensitivity (AAAG).

This article suggests that a more comprehensive comprehension and implementation of the legal principle of equality and non-discrimination in inclusive education could assist the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in enhancing inclusiveness in social protection programmes for students with special educational needs from all backgrounds. An analysis of research on social programmes and social protection in inclusive education could potentially assist policymakers in achieving the goal of a unhindered environment for students with special educational needs (SEN).

**Key words:** social policy, standart and quality of living, sustainable development, inclusive education, SEN students, digitalization of higher education, education quality.

## **Introduction**

The object of the research is the Kazakhstan governmental support system of students with special educational needs (SEN).

The subject of the research is the impact of the normative-legal documents on the provision and improvement of SEN student's social support.

The article is aimed to study the effectiveness of the social policies directed to the enlarging an access to education for SEN students in Kazakhstan. In order to achieve the goal, the following research objectives were proposed:

1. to analyse the Kazakhstan governmental support system of the SEN students, including provided benefits and services;
2. to evaluate the influence and effectiveness of the ratified international documents as well as passed laws on the development of the inclusive education.

The research methodology includes Desk research of the normative-legal documents regulating governmental support of the SEN students in Kazakhstan, and the empirical data analysis (survey and focus group discussions).

Authors put forward the following hypothesis: "governmental actions bring progress on the provision of the high-quality education for the SEN students".

The study represents information about the role of the government and other organizations working on the enhancing educational and living conditions of SEN students, also it helps to identify effective approaches in the field, that may be useful in raising effectiveness of state and public support for this category of students.

The first paragraph of the Supreme Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan affirms that Kazakhstan is a democratic, secular, legal and social state, the highest values of which are the human being, his life, rights and freedoms [1]. Conceptions, programs and legislative acts are drafted in accordance with this statement. Ratification and recognition of international conventions, documents reflecting the issues of social policy is an important direction of the country's development.

As we explore the inclusive education in Kazakhstan, our analysis is guided by a commitment to fostering dialogue, understanding, and positive change. By critically evaluating the alignment between policy rhetoric and on-the-ground realities, we aim to identify potential areas for improvement within Kazakhstan's inclusive education landscape. Furthermore, our exploration aims to contribute to the broader discourse surrounding inclusive education, advocating for policies and practices that uphold the principles of equity, inclusivity, and social justice for all learners in Kazakhstan. Through collaborative efforts and informed action, we aspire to pave pathways towards a more inclusive and equitable educational future for generations to come.

## **Research method**

The analysis of support and development of inclusive education is based on Desk research - collection of information about normative and legal documents related to the development and support of inclusive education from websites, from the office of the national agency for strategic

planning and reforms of the RK. The objective of the desk research is to analyze the social policy in terms of inclusive education in recent years. In addition, this research contains empirical data collected during the state research work on “Social modernization of New Kazakhstan: improving living standards and formation of optimal social policy for socially vulnerable population” (2023-2024), where families of socially vulnerable population (1912 families), including families receiving child disability benefits (132 families) were interviewed, as well as 10 focus group discussions with the expert community.

## **Discussion**

Alexander Goffman defines social equality as the absence of significant differences between individuals or groups in terms of access to resources, opportunities and rights within a society. He emphasizes that social equality encompasses economic, political and cultural aspects, seeking fairness and justice in distribution and participation. Goffman argues that true social equality goes beyond mere legal provisions or official declarations and requires active efforts to remove systemic barriers and ensure equal chances for all members of society to thrive and contribute [2].

The concept of social equality is a discursive and debatable phenomenon. It is rooted in the idea of establishing principles that guarantee equal access to different spheres of life, including opportunities, resources and rights, regardless of social status, ethnicity, gender identity, religious beliefs or any other discriminatory factors [2].

Inclusive education is closely aligned with Goffman's vision of social equity, striving to provide all learners, regardless of background, ability or difference, with equal access to quality education. Inclusive education recognizes and values diversity, ensuring that every learner feels welcomed, supported and empowered in the educational environment. By adopting inclusive policies, schools foster a sense of belonging and respect, promoting cooperation and understanding among learners. Moreover, inclusive education not only benefits individual learners, but also contributes to the broader goal of building an inclusive and more equitable society where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential and participate in social, economic and political life.

According to international standards, namely the Organization of the Countries of Economic Cooperation and Development in our country, three groups of reasons causing difficulties in learning in students, which becomes the cause of special educational needs are considered:

- psychophysical developmental disorders;
- behavioral and emotional issues;
- unfavorable living conditions (social, psychological, economic, linguistic, etc. problems).

By students in this study college and university students are considered. Some of this group are under 18 years. Therefore, it is worth starting the research by mentioning laws and programs that protect children's rights. According to the international conventions and other documents on the protection of children's rights, the legislation of Kazakhstan has introduced the definition of children with special educational needs and the principle of an access to quality education for all students, taking into account their individual capabilities.

The first document to analyse to is the Convention on the Rights of the Child [3], adopted by the UN General Assembly. There is an affirmations of the principle of non-discrimination, guaranteeing equal rights for all children, including those with disabilities. This means that children with disabilities should have access to education, health care, social protection and other services without any form of discrimination.

Secondly, the Convention emphasises the right of all children to accessible and quality education. It obliges States parties to take measures to ensure inclusive education that takes into account the individual needs of each child. This includes adapting curricula, using special teaching methods and providing additional support in the educational process.

A third important aspect is that children with disabilities has a right to participate in society and to determine their own well-being. In the document it is clearly said that children with disabilities should express their perspectives and take part in making essential decisions. States parties are obliged to create conditions for children with disabilities to participate in public life, including the possibility to participate in educational, cultural and sporting activities.

Overall, the UN General Assembly's Convention on the Rights of the Child plays a key role in protecting and ensuring the rights of children with disabilities by affirming the principles of equality, accessibility and participation in public life. It emphasises the need for social and especially educational systems that are inclusive, equal and sensitive for all children.

Another important instrument is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [4], ratification of which was a significant step in Kazakhstan's social policy aimed at enhancing the standard quality of life of its nation. This act affirms the country's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities and protecting the rights of all citizens, including people with disabilities. Ratification of the Convention obliges the state to take concrete measures to create an accessible environment, ensuring equal access to education, employment, health care and other spheres of life. This step reflects Kazakhstan's strategic vision of social policy aimed at the inclusive development of society and improving the living standards of all its citizens.

Inclusivity in all domains of the society is one of the most significant topics of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [5]. According to SDGs, the challenge encompasses several dimensions, ranging from ensuring access to education for all people, regardless of their abilities and characteristics, to creating conditions for equitable learning and development for all individuals.

Goal 4 'Quality education' is directly linked to inclusive education, as it seeks to ensure access to high quality education for all, enhancing the skills and qualifications of learners regardless of their social status or physical abilities. Inclusive education is also closely linked to Goal 10, Reducing Inequalities, as it seeks to reduce the gap in educational opportunities between different population groups.

Kazakhstan actively supports the implementation of these Sustainable Development Goals, including through the developing of inclusive education programmes and policies. The country has invested efforts in developing innovative teaching methods, making educational resources available to all learners, and raising awareness of inclusive education among society and the professional education community. All of this enables the country to move towards a more equitable and inclusive educational space.

The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the RK on Inclusive Education” [6] of 26 June 2021 represents a significant change in Kazakhstan's legal framework aimed at ensuring equal access to education for students with disabilities. These changes demonstrate the Government's serious commitment to creating an inclusive educational environment. They include providing additional resources and support to colleges and universities, adapting teaching programmes and training qualified professionals.

The attention paid to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive education is also important. These measures contribute to the creation of a quality educational environment where every student can realise his or her potential. The Law emphasises the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for all students in education, which is a key element of Kazakhstan's social policy. Such a method promotes the stable development of the education system and rallies the level and quality of life of the population.

On the whole, innovations in the legal and regulatory framework reflect the desire for inclusive education as an important factor of social inclusion and development of society. Such development of legislations in Kazakhstan ensure that students with disabilities would have an equal access to education. The state administration eagers to design an inclusive educational environment. Subsequently, to meet all the spectrum of children needs schools are provided with specialised resources and equipment. Schools, in turn, adapt curriculum and programmes. These changes in the legal and regulatory framework are aimed at removing barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their physical or mental abilities. Such changes in the school system provide hope that other levels of education will improve conditions for all students.

It is also worth mentioning that the new installations pay detailed attention to the training of qualified educational professionals who can work cost-effectively with students with special educational needs. This includes the development of specialised training programmes for future teachers, as well as systematic trainings and seminars on inclusive education. Such measures contribute to the creation of a quality educational environment in which every student can realise his or her potential and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for successful development.

The new legal and regulatory framework also provides approaches of examination and measuring the validity of the innovations, allowing the Government of Kazakhstan to assess progress in this area and make necessary adjustments to its policies. Such a method promotes the stable development of the education system and rallies the level and quality of life of the population, providing conditions for the full participation of all children in the educational process and society in general.

Kazakhstan has a system of State support for SEN students, including allowances at different stages of their lives. For children up to the age of seven, an allowance of 69,886 tenge is provided, and for disabled children from the age of seven to 18, the amount of the allowance differs depending on the disability group. In addition, parents are provided with an allowance of 69,886 tenge to care for a disabled child [7]. In addition to state support, charitable foundations, such as the Dara Centre, significantly contribute to improving the conditions of living and education of children with disabilities. The Foundation's mission includes not only improving the living

conditions and socialisation of orphans and children with disabilities, but also participation in the development of proposals to improve legislation and practice in this are [8]. The Foundation also actively supports inclusive education through the creation of resource centres and a system of support for schools to include children with special needs in the educational process.

Another important document providing normative and legal protection for students with disabilities is the Concept of Development of Preschool, Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029 [9]. The Concept of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029 envisages the design of an inclusive educational settings for SEN students. This includes updating qualification requirements for teachers, expanding the network of specialised classrooms and support centres, and increasing the availability of special programmes and resources for children with special educational needs. There are also plans to create a holistic system of early identification and remedial assistance, as well as to ensure continuity of education from childhood to employment, which promotes integration and social adaptation of this category of children.

Accordingly to the Concept, active work will be done to develop and approve generally binding infrastructure standards that provide comfortable conditions for the education and development of children with disabilities. Additionally, further improvements of the educational route for this category of students, from early childhood to vocational training and employment, are planned. Specialised centres and coordinating organisations responsible for inclusive and special education in the country will be established to coordinate these efforts.

The Ministry of Education is carrying out comprehensive work to ensure equal access to education for SEN students and individual capabilities. Requirements have been introduced to create special conditions for education, including flexibility in curricula and programmes for students with special educational needs. A teaching assistant position has been incorporated into the regular school staff to systematically prepare teachers and specialists in psychological and pedagogical support for the implementation of inclusive practices, efforts are underway to enhance their qualifications. [10].

From 2020 to 2022, 400 inclusion support rooms were introduced in schools in Kazakhstan, and the number of teaching assistants exceeded 1,200 people. The measures taken make it possible to create comfortable conditions for the education of SEN children [11].

As reported by the National Education Database 2023, 40 per cent of pre-schools, 80 per cent of schools and 70 per cent of colleges have created an inclusive education environment. According to data from regional psychological, medical and pedagogical consultations, 188,144 children with special educational needs have been identified. A total of 141,563 SEN children (75.2 per cent) receive special psychological and pedagogical support in educational organisations [12].

At the level of higher education in Kazakhstan, conditions are also being created to support students with special education needs. For example, since 2023, the L.Gumilev ENU has been successfully operating the Inclusive Support Centre, which provides accessibility of training and development in a barrier-free environment for persons with disabilities (PD) [13]. This center provides a plenty of opportunities and support for SEN students. For instance, The Kөmek Volunteer Club, which operates on a 2+1 model, has been set up to support and support people with disabilities. The '2+1 model' is the assignment of 2 volunteers who have undergone special

instructions and provide social, psychological and physical support to people with disabilities who need support. Additionally, there is a Map of accessibility of the university academic building and student houses for PD was developed.

In addition, the schedule of classes of the group of students with disabilities and the socio-psychological characteristics of students in the group are monitored by the teachers of the department. If the group of students with disabilities, lectures, practical classes of the group are placed on the 1st floor of the building. This, in turn, contributes to comfortable movement of the student in the environment.

In the SMNK project's boundaries the survey of families with disabled children showed that the main problems of these families are low wages (17.8 per cent of the total), absence of babysitter (12.2 per cent), lack of work (10 per cent), lack of education (7.8 per cent) and not meeting the requirements of the employer (6.7 per cent). In addition, these families were asked what support measures they needed to improve their lives. According to the survey, 25 per cent indicated that they needed support in finding employment, 23.5 per cent in starting a business, and 9.8 per cent in obtaining additional labour skills. The current situation shows that socially vulnerable families with disabled students need to rise their incomes, and they are willing to look for new sources of income without depending on special state payments and allowances. Concerning this, the state needs to modernise current policies to support families with students with disabilities and provide assistance and support in increasing family income. For example, the State could assist in finding additional work opportunities, provide information on job vacancies, and assist with skills training, CV preparation, interviewing and other assistance. It is suggested to expand state support for starting a business for such families with more loyal and subsidised conditions, both in terms of financial and non-financial support. It is important to open new centres for students with disabilities, which could help the parents of a child to be free from guardianship and to be able to receive and increase income through employment or business.

During focus group discussions with the expert community represented by government agencies, charities and other organisations serving socially vulnerable groups of the population, a proposal was put forward to introduce a discount system for mothers with many children and mothers raising disabled children in convenience stores. The issue of the need to equalise the growth (indexation) of allowances and social payments with pensions was raised. Another important issue is the strengthening of control over the social portal, which is used to purchase means and equipment for socially vulnerable population, including disabled people, with the governmental financial support.

The survey data and focus group discussions also showed the importance of digitalisation of the education system, including higher education, as digitalisation tools contribute to facilitating the process of education. It is also shown in the results of the study [14], which highlights the importance of applying digitalisation to educational processes to improve the inclusion of students with different profiles in online learning. It is obvious that further digitalisation of higher education will positively affect the access to learning for SEN students.

Moreover, our inquiry extends beyond the confines of educational policy to encompass broader social policy frameworks that underpin the provision of equal opportunities for individuals with

diverse learning needs. Within the socio-political fabric of Kazakhstan, these frameworks serve as guiding principles, shaping the allocation of resources, the design of support structures, and the societal attitudes towards inclusivity and diversity within the educational sphere.

## **Conclusions**

Ensurance of better quality of life of the population, including people with special educational needs and disabilities, is always one of the main directions of state social policies. The results of the research confirm that state support for Kazakhstani SEN students is essential in improving their standard and quality of life. Benefits provided by the state, including allowances for caring for a disabled child and exemption from state fees, contribute to enhancing level of living and socialisation of this category of the population.

In addition, the review of legal and regulatory documents on inclusive education in Kazakhstan allows to identify key points in the development of an optimal model of social policy. Ratification of relevant conventions and adoption of laws and programmes allow to create a legislative framework for the application of inclusive education and access to educational resources for children with disabilities. We can conclude that following steps can enhance standarts and quality of living of SEN students:

\*to continiously improve normative acts to guarantee their effective implementation in practice;

\*to train teaching staff;

\*to create specialised educational institutions;

\*to create conditions for increasing the income of guardians of students with disabilities;

\*to digitalize education, including higher education.

Thus, further research in this area can affect the development of an optimal model of social policy aimed at improving the standart and quality of life of the population, especially students with disabilities and disabled people, in Kazakhstan.

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## **Contribution of the authors:**

**1) Sakenova Saliya Muratovna** – writing a text and a critical revision of its content

**2) Baygabylov Nurlan Oralbaevich** – a significant contribution to the concept, approval of the final version of the article for publication

**3) Akpanov Altynbek Alibekovich** – collection, analysis, and interpretation of work results.

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### **Халықтың өмір сүру деңгейін жақсарту және өмір сүру сапасын қамтамасыз ету жөніндегі әлеуметтік саясаттың оңтайлы моделі (инклюзивті білім беру мысалында)**

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақалада инклюзивті білім беруді мысал ретінде пайдалана отырып, өз халқының өмір сүру деңгейі мен сапасын арттыруға бағытталған Қазақстанның әлеуметтік саясаты қарастырылады.

Халықтың осал топтарына білім беру көптеген елдердегі әлеуметтік саясаттың негізгі элементі болып табылады. Бұл Қазақстан халқының жан-жақты өмір сүру деңгейін жақсартудың маңызды факторы болып табылады.

Мақалада әлеуметтік саясаттың халықтың осал топтары үшін білімге қол жетімділікке әсері және оның Қазақстандағы өмір сүру деңгейіне әсері туралы алдыңғы зерттеулер қарастырылған. Онда ХЕҰ-ның № 202 ұсыныстарына және қол жетімділік, бейімделу, қол жетімділік және гендерлік сезімталдық стандарттарына (АААГ) сәйкес адам құқықтарына негізделген барлығын әлеуметтік қорғауды қамтамасыз ететін инклюзивті әлеуметтік саясатқа көшу талқыланады.

Бұл мақалада инклюзивті білім берудегі теңдік пен кемсітпеушіліктің құқықтық принципін жан-жақты түсіну және жүзеге асыру Білім министрлігі мен Еңбек және халықты әлеуметтік қорғау министрлігіне барлық ортадан шыққан ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар студенттерді әлеуметтік қорғау бағдарламаларына инклюзивтілікті арттыруға көмектесуі мүмкін деп болжануда. Инклюзивті білім берудегі әлеуметтік бағдарламалар мен әлеуметтік қорғау саласындағы зерттеулерді талдау саясаткерлерге ерекше білім беру қажеттіліктері бар студенттер үшін кедергісіз орта құру мақсатына жетуге көмектесуі мүмкін.

**Түйін сөздер:** әлеуметтік саясат, өмір сүру деңгейі мен сапасы, тұрақты даму, инклюзивті білім беру, СЕН студенттері, жоғары білімді цифрландыру, білім сапасы.

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### **Оптимальная модель социальной политики для повышения уровня и обеспечения качества жизни населения (на примере инклюзивного образования)**

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматривается социальная политика Казахстана, направленная на повышение уровня и качества жизни населения на примере инклюзивного образования.

Предоставление образования уязвимым группам населения является ключевым элементом социальной политики во многих странах. Это жизненно важный фактор повышения общего уровня жизни населения Казахстана.

В статье дается обзор предыдущих исследований, посвященных влиянию социальной политики на доступ уязвимых групп к образованию и ее влиянию на уровень жизни в Казахстане. В ней обсуждается переход к инклюзивной социальной политике, которая обеспечивает

социальную защиту для всех на основе прав человека в соответствии с рекомендациями МОТ № 202 и стандартами доступности, адаптивности, приемлемости и учета гендерных факторов (AAAG).

В этой статье предполагается, что более полное понимание и реализация правового принципа равенства и недискриминации в инклюзивном образовании могли бы помочь Министерству образования и Министерству труда и социальной защиты в повышении инклюзивности программ социальной защиты для учащихся с особыми образовательными потребностями из всех слоев общества. Анализ исследований, посвященных социальным программам и социальной защите в сфере инклюзивного образования, потенциально может помочь разработчикам политики в достижении цели создания беспрепятственной среды для учащихся с особыми образовательными потребностями.

**Ключевые слова:** социальная политика, уровень и качество жизни, устойчивое развитие, инклюзивное образование, студенты с ООП, цифровизация высшего образования, качество образования.

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