

Turkmenistan Social Services Assessment



«Social protection plays a vital role in strengthening the resilience of children, families and communities, achieving greater equity, and supporting national human and economic development.»

UNICEF Social Protection Strategic Framework, 2012

THE SOCIAL SERVICE ASSESSMENT WAS COMMISSIONED BY UNICEF TURKMENISTAN IN 2014 TO ANALYZE THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF SOCIAL SERVICES PROVISION TO FAMILIES AND CHILDREN AND ELABORATE ON POSSIBLE WAYS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT.

Methodology

The assessment was based on interviews and focus group discussions with 120 social services system stakeholders including national local and regional authorities, specialists and professionals; parents and grandparents of vulnerable children; managers and specialists from state and NGO service providing organizations.

Main research questions were to identify major needs of families with children in urban and rural areas, service providers and type of services at local level, governance structure of the social services system, existing inter-sectoral interaction.

Definitions of social services

The concept of **social services** is not defined in the legislation of Turkmenistan so there is no defined agency responsible for development and delivery of social services.

Social protection is defined in the Code on Social Security of 2007 amended in 2012 as: ‘social protection represents the state system of material provision and social service of non-able-bodied people, disabled and families with children and other through payments in the form of pensions, state benefits and social allowances’ (UNICEF, 2013). At the same time the code mentions social services as part of a definition of social assistance:

Social assistance includes a series of social services provided to persons with disabilities at home or in social assistance institutions: 1) social assistance at home, including social-medical assistance; 2) half-residential social assistance in day-care social assistance facilities; 3) residential social assistance in full-time social assistance facilities. (cited in UNICEF, 2014b)

Figure 1: Source - P4EC CEE/CIS consultancy group



This assessment included the first two types of social assistance provision in its scope, but specific data on residential institutions was not gathered as part of this study. It focused on exploring the provision of social services in the community and outside of these residential facilities, while recognizing that they represent a major investment in social services provision for children by the Government of Turkmenistan.

Main findings

The main two pillars of the system of social assistance in Turkmenistan are extended family and cash benefits including disability and loss of breadwinner allowances. The assessment has shown, however, that there are also other informal community based systems of

support in place in the form of village councils and formal social services of various kinds being provided by state, non-government and public organizations.

State social protection centers offer home-care and center based services to older adults and to adults with disabilities. NGOs and public organizations offer mainly material aid, support with disability equipment and medical treatment, consultation and information. The main demand for services in the current system is from children with disabilities and their families, especially if extended family support is not available; children living in guardianship; children without family care. To a lesser extent, there is demand for services for families with children who are struggling to provide care for a range of reasons.

Figure 2: Typology of target groups for social services identified by respondents

1	Children with disabilities and their parents and families
2	Children in guardianship care and their guardians
3	Children whose parents have disabilities
4	Children without parental care or orphans
5	Children in the care of single parents without other extended family support
6	Children whose parents are struggling to provide care for social or psychological reasons
7	Young people

There is some capacity within the existing network of service providers to provide more services to new target groups, for example the State social protection centers could feasibly provide home care services for some older children and young people with multiple disabilities in most regions without significantly increasing their staffing capacity.

Some NGOs have national reach and could provide services to more clients as part of state commissioned service delivery.

On the whole, however, there is a need to develop new community-based social services targeting support to children with disabilities and their families, to children without family care and to families with children who are struggling to provide care. This will require detailed needs assessments at the local level aggregated up to regional and national service development plans. There are some social work specialists active in NGOs and public organizations, but there is a need to considerably strengthen human resources in the social sector.

Recommendations

Five options for the development of social services are discussed, based on the findings of the assessment with a focus on building on existing strengths including extended family and informal community support systems:

Option 1	Continue to attach social work functions and provision of social services to existing Etrap-based services focused on habilitation and child development
Option 2	Strengthened Velayat child protection and family support services attached to Khyakimlik statutory bodies
Option 3	Further strengthen school and kindergarten based social pedagogy
Option 4	Contracting NGOs to develop and deliver services – generic or specialized
Option 5	Expand service delivery from existing social protection centers, Infant homes and newly developing Rehabilitation centers

Some or all of these options can be explored for further development prior to piloting. Any service development has to be based community needs assessments.

An integrated information management system should be developed to ensure that data is available to support informed decision-making.

Next steps

To conclude, recommendations for the next steps for moving forward with social services development can be summarized as follows:

- Consider experience of other countries – UK, Germany, France, Serbia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Kazakhstan – to assess what has worked and not worked and which parts of this experience are relevant to Turkmenistan.

Develop a conceptual framework on social services and social work defining goals and objectives and how they relate to other policies such as inclusive education, early childhood development and social protection. The key elements of social work such as referral, case management, assessment and review

should also be set out.

- Training and education of an initial cadre of social work specialists and social services managers.
- Needs assessment and regional service development planning in pilot Etraps/Velayats involving the newly trained specialists and managers as well as capacity building of local authorities to manage these processes going forward
- Information management system created and tested based on regional assessments
- Pilot services and system options based on the regional service development plans
- Document and evaluate
- National roll-out.

The full assessment report is available at UNICEF Turkmenistan Country Office

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