



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

Government of Turkmenistan - United Nations Joint Programme



UNITED NATIONS
TURKMENISTAN



JOINT SDG FUND



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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.



Main achievements of the joint programme

1



A new Law on Social Services has been adopted and several regulations have been developed.

2



The Social Code of Turkmenistan has been revised and amended in accordance with the new Law on Social Services.

3



Piloting is nearing completion of 12 brand new specialized social services that are central to the community-based social services model.

4



Normative documentation for new specialized social services has been developed for further submission to the government to support the implementation of these each services at the level of providers.

5



The salaries of 45 social workers have been included in the state budget.

6



Staff of existing government and non-government social service providers and their administrations, as well as staff from social work-related professions (including guardianship authorities, juvenile affairs inspectorates, police, drug treatment clinics, and the education and health sectors), have been trained in a wide range of areas of social support, including learning by doing, which has accelerated the achievement of results.

7



Many people have tangibly benefited from the provision of social services, and the number of recipients of public social services has almost doubled.

8



Social workers and employees of public organizations involved in piloting social services were not only able to quickly get to work, but were also trained in the basics and practice of social work and social assistance.

9



Public organizations piloting some specialized social services have shown the potential and effectiveness of non-governmental organizations in providing social services at the local level, even with fairly modest funding.

10



A Community of Practice has been established for social services in Turkmenistan that links practitioners (social services, health, education and law enforcement), policy makers and academics in the country and abroad.

With the support of the UN Country Team in Turkmenistan, the Government is expanding and modernizing its range of social services, introducing the concept of social work and developing a national model of inclusive social services at the local level. The model has two elements:

- A statutory, community-based social work system to assess need for care, support and protection of individuals or families, develop support plans and provide or manage the provision of services.
- Specialized community-based services to support vulnerable populations with specific needs.

The Joint Programme strategy built on multiple studies by UNICEF that resulted in the drafting of a ten-year Action Plan for development of social services and the social ser-

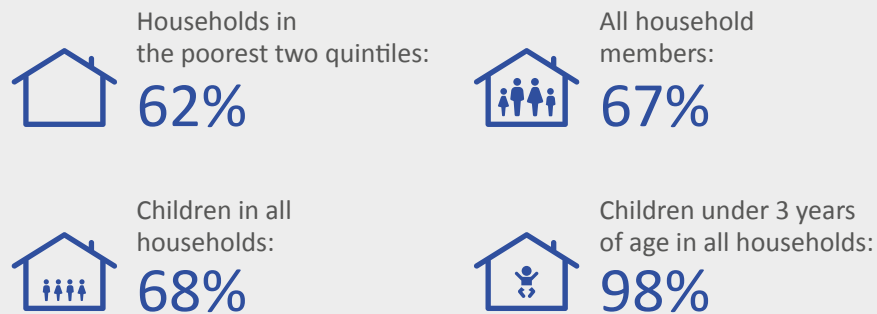
vice workforce. It is also based on UNDP research on the extent to which the needs of vulnerable groups are met in the country by available social services, and recommendations for the introduction of new social services at local level, including an assessment of non-governmental providers' capacity to provide social services based on state tenders, and on UNDP's experience of developing and implementing social protection reform in Turkmenistan, including pension insurance and social assistance, as well as previous activities under the mandates of UNFPA and UNODC to promote an intersectoral system of social services for at-risk youth and women who have been subjected to gender-based violence.

The 2019 MICS survey provided data disaggregated by residence, age, and disability status about the proportion of the population who have knowledge of where and how to access community-based social services. The survey also enabled evaluation of the attitudes of women to violence, thus revealing the importance of social work in this field.

The new model of community-level social services has been designed for the social and cultural context of Turkmenistan. The lead national partner in the Joint Programme is the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of Turkmenistan (MLSP) and the lead United Nations agency is UNICEF. Other key national partners include the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan, Ministry of Interior of Turkmenistan, Ministry of Adalat (Justice), Mejlis Milli Gengesh (Parliament) and the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan.

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Coverage of social transfers and benefits



Jointly with the UN, the Government is working to **increase awareness of social services among the population.**



Joint Programme partners: United Nations in Turkmenistan

Four resident United Nations entities have been working with national partners to achieve the goals of the Joint Programme. Their roles in the Joint Programme are summarized below:

Organization

Role in project



The **United Nations Children's Fund** (UNICEF) works in over 190 countries and territories to save children's lives, to defend their rights, and to help them fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. And we never give up.

Overall lead on planning, assessment, supporting implementation, analysis and monitoring of Joint Programme **Strategic support** to government partners for implementation of Joint Programme and resulting social service model, including **supporting recruitment and deployment of social workers in 20 districts** across the regions of Turkmenistan.

Supporting a **Chief Technical Advisory Group** through Partnership for Every Child (P4EC) with the aim of ensuring a coherent, consolidated, technical approach to **developing social work** in Turkmenistan.

Supporting the establishment of theory and practice of social work in Turkmenistan. **Developing national standards of higher education, curricula and programmes** for social work adapted to national context.

Designing and piloting new types of social services for children with disabilities, children and adolescents without parental care, and children at risk of separation from parents.



On the ground in about 170 countries and territories, the **United Nations Development Programme** (UNDP) works to eradicate poverty while protecting the planet. We help countries develop strong policies, skills, partnerships and institutions so they can sustain their progress.

Training in the theory and practice of social work and capacity building of the social services of Turkmenistan through more than 113 days of training for more than 300 new and existing social work practitioners, including social workers, allied professionals to social work, and managers and employees at government and non-government social service providers services at the national, regional and local levels.

Conducting an inventory of existing social services and assessing the needs of target groups in specialized services.

Conducting socio-economic analysis of the social significance of new specialized social services to demonstrate their advantages over existing social services and provide a rationale for their introduction into the national social protection system.

Development and piloting of new personal assistant social services for people with official disability status, elderly single people and people with chronic diseases through non-governmental social service providers in order to secure promotion and adoption by the government of a mechanism for social tendering of non-governmental social service providers to expand the range and improve the quality of social service provision for vulnerable groups in Turkmenistan.



The **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime** (UNODC) is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. UNODC operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices.

Developing of **programmes of social work with families with substance use disorders and for youth at risk of contact with the law.**

Delivering **training for social workers and allied professionals** on work with persons with substance use disorders, youth at risk of substance use, youth in contact with criminal justice system and their families

Contributing to the development of standard operating procedures, social service standards and service specifications intended for the groups listed above and the review of legislation and regulatory framework for social services for these groups.

Designing and piloting services for youth at risk, including those in conflict with the law, and families/parents with substance use disorders, and developing models of parental support to reduce risky behaviours in adolescents



The **United Nations Population Fund** (UNFPA) is dedicated to promoting the right of all women, men and children to health and equal opportunity. The UNFPA Strategic Plans (2018-2021, 2022-2025) aim to end gender-based violence through three transformative outcomes: zero preventable maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning, and zero gender-based violence by 2030.

Supporting and conducting a review of national legislation, identifying gaps and making recommendations for amending the legislative and regulatory framework to sustain the proposed new system of community-based social services

Proposing optimal administrative/institutional framework sustaining new social service system at national, regional and local levels

Ensuring that Standard Operating Procedures on responding to gender-based violence are introduced into new social service package

Designing and piloting social services to ensure the rights and protection of women and girls experiencing gender-based violence and various reproductive health risks





National partners:

- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of Turkmenistan
- Mejlis (Parlament) of Turkmenistan
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan
- Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan
- Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan
- Ministry of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan
- Ministry of the Interior of Turkmenistan
- Ministry of Adalat of Turkmenistan
- Ministry of Sports and Youth Policy of Turkmenistan
- Institute of State, Law and Democracy of Turkmenistan
- State Committee for Statistics of Turkmenistan
- National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan
- CSO "Yenme"
- CSO "Keyik Okara"
- CSO "Beyyik Eyyam"
- CSO "Deaf and Blind Society"

International expert support:

- Eastern European Institute for Reproductive Health (Romania)
- Partnership for Every Child (International NGO)
- Social Activities and Practices Institute (Bulgaria)



COMPONENT

1

Improving the system of social protection

through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services

Inclusive community-based social service model with its key elements developed and introduced

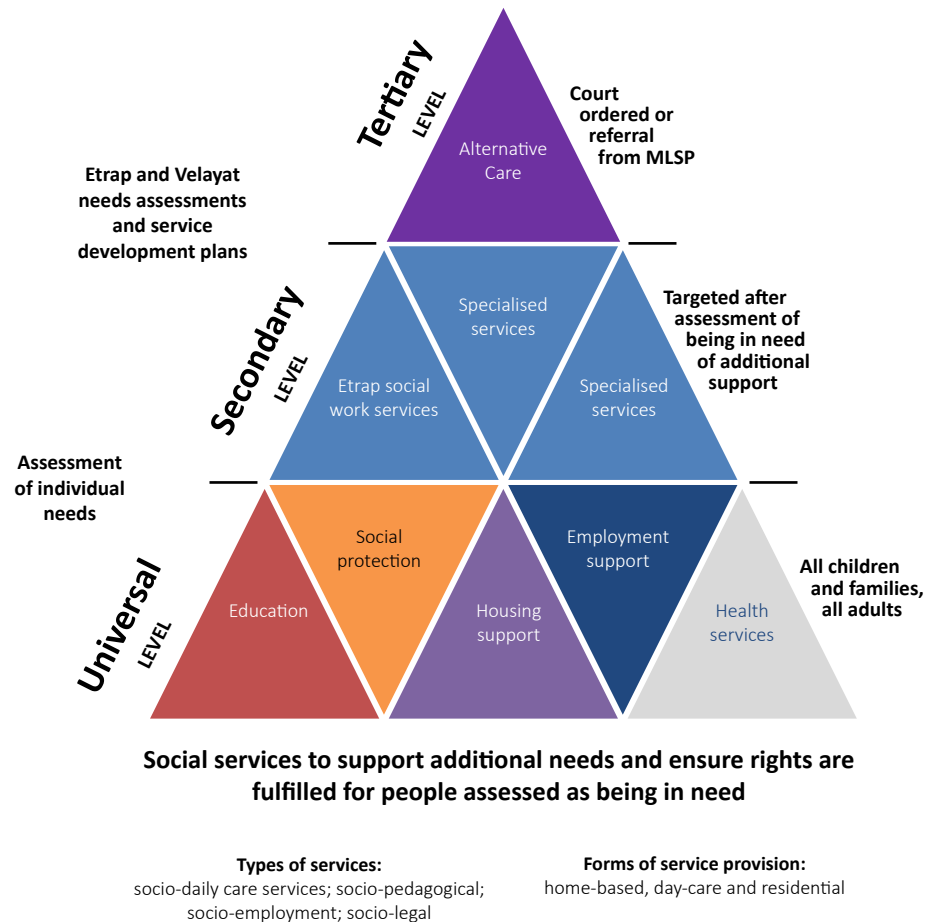


Design and costing of a model for services

The Joint Programme partners have developed a model of social services that, when fully rolled out, will ensure that those in vulnerable groups gain access to the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural life.

The prototype models of inclusive community-based social services that have been developed under the Joint Programme address the root causes of exclusion and the consequences of social exclusion. They promote the empowerment of service users and address – at all levels – the multiple vulnerabilities and needs of those currently being left behind.

The model developed for the social sector is made up of three levels. At the universal level, services available directly where needed for all children and adults in the country in several sectors. These include access to education, housing, social protection, employment and health services. A secondary level of services – that are currently being piloted under the Joint Programme – will be provided after assessments that identify a need for additional social support. These include social worker services at etrap level, as well as 12 specialized services. These services will generally be provided at home or in community centres, and also in cooperation with non-governmental social service providers. Finally, the tertiary level services (residential care) are only to be provided with court orders or referrals from the MLSP.



TERTIARY SERVICES

- ▲ **Alternative care:** Residential care

SECONDARY SERVICES

- ▲ **Etrap social work service:** assessment, direct support, referral, case management. Inspector for juvenile affairs.
- ▲ **Specialised services:** Personal assistant, care leavers, crisis shelter, active family support for children in families in difficult situations
- ▲ **Specialised services:** reintegration from residential care; parent training; daily-care

PRIMARY MEASURES in other sectors

- ▲ **Education:** early childhood development, kindergarten, school, further education.
- ▲ **Housing support:** Social housing. Housing support for care leavers.
- ▲ **Social protection:** cash benefits, subsidies, pensions. Legal aid.
- ▲ **Employment support:** technical, vocational education and training; employment services for families with children and care leavers.
- ▲ **Health services:** incl. mental health services, family doctor, visiting nurse



Social work is a professional activity. It is intended to improve the population's social well-being, living conditions and social functioning, and to harmonize social relations in the family, community and in society as a whole.

The process began with mapping of the existing services and individual needs assessments of target groups in pilot communities. These provided evidence for development and implementation of the new model of social services provision.

New social services were developed, and their economic effectiveness and social significance were evaluated. Government financing mechanisms were put in place for some suggested services. Despite challenges imposed by the global pandemic in 2020, the Joint Programme began training representatives of the country's social services and non-governmental social service providers. The MLS hired an additional 45 state-funded social workers in 2021, who, after appropriate training in the theory and practice of social work, provided services in twenty etraps in Ashgabat and five velayats around Turkmenistan.

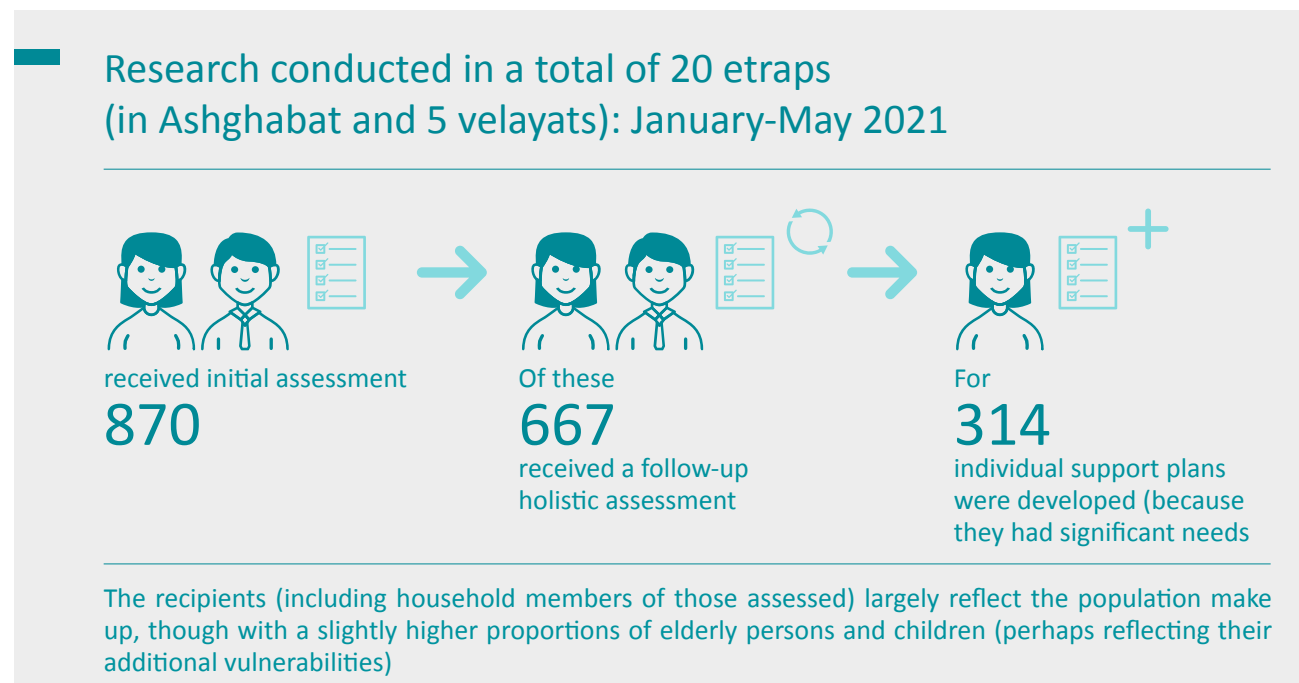
Based on the experience and caseload of the 45 social workers, analysis was conducted of how many social workers would actually be needed in the country to address the needs of the most vulnerable population. The analysis found that over 1,000 social workers will be required by 2030 to support the 0.1 per cent of the population who are the minimum who require social services.⁵ The analysis found that prior to the Joint Programme, 0.01 per cent of the population were using social services, while the pilot social service provision had, in one year, doubled this total to almost 0.02 per cent.⁶

The Joint Programme has also introduced inclusive, quality social services at local level, which have been adapted to delivery in the context of the pandemic and that support socially excluded and low-income households to be more resilient in the face of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19.

4 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

5 Inventory of Social Services. Joint Programme/UNDP. 2020

6 Joint Programme Annual Report. January 2022.



Age group	Recipients		Total population	
	Number	Percentage of recipients	Number ⁴	Percentage of total population
Under 18	934	40	2,152,000	36
18-59	1196	51	3,390,000	56
60 and over	205	9	489,000	8

	Those who did not receive pensions or benefits		Those who received pensions or benefits	
	Number	Percentage of recipients	Number	Percentage of total population
Required service	66	87	284	80
Did not require service	4	5	65	18
Not known	6	8	5	2

Households where pensions and benefits are being received were almost four times as likely not to require further services (5% compared to 18%)

What do we mean by inclusive

Quality social services at local level?

- personal assistant services at for persons with disabilities and single elderly people to support independent living
- social and medical personal assistant services at home for people with chronic diseases who need rehabilitation and care at home
- support services for families in difficult situations, including families with children with disabilities
- services to support the reintegration of children without parental care, as well as comprehensive social support services for children at risk of separation from their parents
- support services for women experiencing to domestic violence
- support services for the reintegration into society of young people leaving institutions
- services for families where the parents suffer from addiction.

Gender competence

Efforts have been made to ensure that gender issues are taken account in the Joint Programme

- The piloted social services are gender-responsive, and the social workers working in them have been trained to be aware of gender and its intersection with disability, poverty and violence
- Standard Operating Procedures on multi-sectoral response gender-based violence have been developed and incorporated into training modules for social workers and the allied workforce
- 2 specialized services have been introduced that specifically target women experiencing to gender-based and domestic violence and women who are experiencing unintended pregnancy or are at risk of abandoning their baby at birth. This is particularly significant as the issues of gender-based violence and domestic violence had not previously been widely discussed in Turkmenistan
- The Women's Union and civil society organizations such as Yenme, Beyyik Eyyam and Keyik Okara have been key partners at the strategic as well as operational levels
- 50 per cent of the social workers employed are women

Design and review of specifications

Legal experts working under the Joint Programme helped the MLSP to draft and review specifications for etrap social workers and for 12 specialized services.

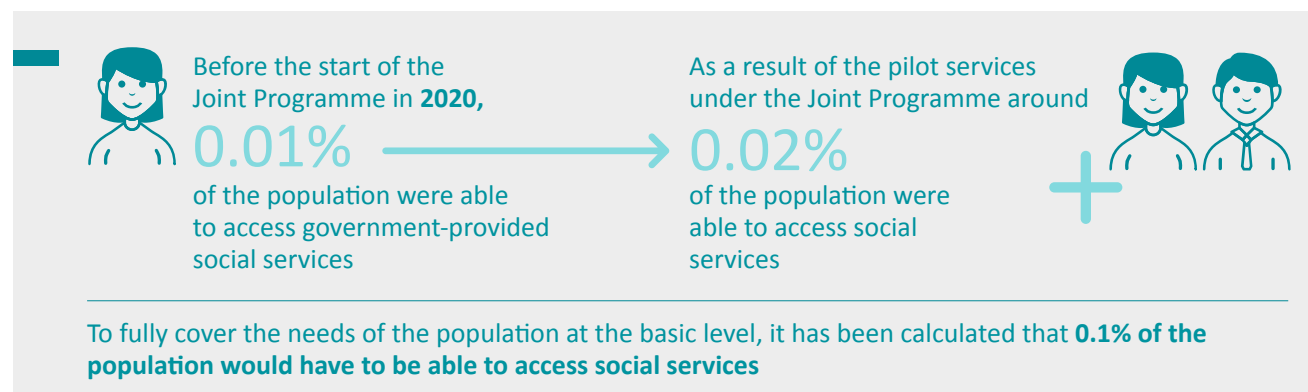
Services are being documented and their effectiveness and results are being monitored.

A regulatory framework at secondary legislation level is being drafted by the Joint Programme team for submission to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of Turkmenistan. Once adopted, this regulatory framework will enable full implementation of the new Law on Social Services 2022. The proposed regulatory framework is gender-, disability- and child-sensitive, and takes into account the needs of vulnerable groups including women, children and the elderly.

Assessments

As a result of the Joint Programme, 45 social work specialists in 20 etraps have assessed the needs of 1,132 households (a total of 4,897 beneficiaries⁷) for new types of specialized social services to meet specific needs and support them to live independent lives in their communities. Those cases are largely representative, by age and sex, of the population of the country.

Most of those persons assessed for services – primarily pensioners and social benefit recipients - were referred for assessment by the social workers of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of Turkmenistan. In Ahal velayat, specialists conducted outreach to identify new beneficiaries, and there were higher levels of self-referral.



Direct support from social workers and specialized services

Social workers, with the support of providers of specialized services have provided direct support to vulnerable groups. In total, around 675 families, made up of 1,241 children and 1,862 adults⁸ have benefited from direct support of etrap social work specialists, including referral to other services and complex assessments.

Twelve specialized social services have directly supported 292 vulnerable people and their families⁹ (around

8 Joint Programme Annual Report. January 2022

9 Analysis presented to Joint Programme Steering Committee. March 2022

567 people) and transformed their lives supporting social inclusion and addressing complex social, psychological and poverty-related issues as well as disability, child protection and domestic violence. The service users from July 2021 to March 2022 have included:¹⁰

- 17 children with disabilities and their families
- 19 families with children in difficult life situations
- 7 infants in infant homes and their families, with the aim to reintegrate them into their families: by the end of December 2021, 2 had returned home and continued to be supported
- 10 young people leaving residential care
- 60 young people at risk and their families
- 67 women experiencing gender-based and domestic violence
- 5 women facing unwanted pregnancy or abandoning their newborn infants
- 50 men and women with disabilities
- 50 older women and men with no support from their families
- 37 people recovering from chronic illness
- More than 1,379 people who had received support through hotlines by 31 March 2022

10 Joint Programme records



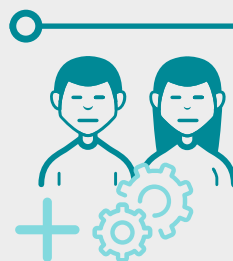
Example of how specialized services should work:

Person with a disability, without parental support, living in difficult conditions, without necessary adaptive equipment, dependent on benefits

Daily visits by specially trained personal assistant

After

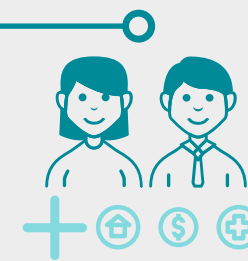
3 months:



Assistance to address everyday challenges, increased mobility, greater control of own life

After

6-12 months:



Increased self-confidence, completed training course, found employment and increased income



Oguljeren, a 65-year-old woman has difficulties living independently. After losing her younger daughter to an incurable diseases, she was diagnosed with cancer and undergoing surgery, She has been affected physically and mentally, and her quality of life has worsened. She also has diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary heart disease.

In recent months, things have been changing for the better for Oguljeren with the support of a personal ssistant who regularly visits her to provide socio-medical services as part of a Joint Programme pilot. Socio-medical services at home for people with chronic illnesses are being piloted by the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan with grant financing from UNDP.

[Read more on UN Turkmenistan's website](#)

Final analysis is being conducted in the first quarter of 2022 of all community and specialized cases. To inform advocacy and further planning for scaling up services. The analysis is disaggregated by sex, age, geographic location and disability.



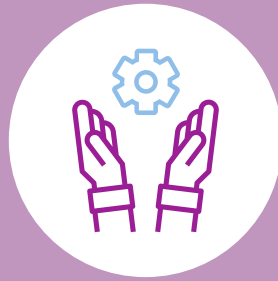


NGO Keyik Okara brings critical relief to women amid domestic violence

After losing her husband, 36-year old Sulgun was gently encouraged by her in-law family to move back with her parents. As full-time carer of her 11-year-old son Serdar, who has a disability, she neither had a job, nor was she welcomed at her parents' home. Sulgun was temporarily living on the balcony of a two-room apartment where she endured verbal abuse and violence from her father and other family members and soon was left homeless. These traumatic experiences seriously affect the health, productivity and the quality of life of women, their children, and generations ahead, and have an impact on the community and the whole country.

Sulgun was in despair and had no friend or family who could support her in her difficult situation. Luckily, she came across a hotline advertisement. After she rang the hotline, run by CSO Keyik Okara, the staff listened to her story, assessed her situation and first referred her to the psychologist. They then arranged several meetings for Sulgun with legal and employment specialist, as well as healthcare professionals (to provide documentation of her son's disability) and the department of education (to place him at school).

"I am finally starting to get back on my feet," said Sulgun. "Every weekend I pick up my Serdar from school and we spend time together at a new apartment that I can now afford. My son can feel that I am no longer as stressed as I was before and now we have energy to fight for a better life," she added.



COMPONENT

2

Improving the system of social protection

through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services

Institutional and regulatory framework established to facilitate introduction of new system for social services



Analysis conducted of legal and normative base for social services

Following analysis of existing national social protection legislation, national programmes and regulations, the Joint Programme supported the development of a proposed legislative and regulatory framework to introduce the new model of social service delivery in Turkmenistan.

The programme has supported the drafting of a new Law on Social Services, which was adopted by the Mejlis (Parliament) in December 2021. The new Law sets out provisions for the development of community-based social services and will expand the range of social services, improve access and coverage of wider vulnerabilities, and have a transformational impact on the lives of vulnerable and excluded people.

Draft normative documents have been developed for twelve generalist and specialized social services to address needs of vulnerable groups including on violence prevention and protection of survivors of domestic violence, personal assistant services and children's services. The piloting of 12 specialized social services began in August 2021 and is currently in progress

At strategy level, a National Social Services Development Plan has been drafted for 2022-2030 that includes establishment of a government inter-sectoral coordination mechanism. The Draft Plan and its Action Plan await adoption.

The pilot model for providing social services with the assistance of social workers at community level has been incorporated into the 2022 state budget.

A High-level Steering Committee for the Joint Programme – chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection

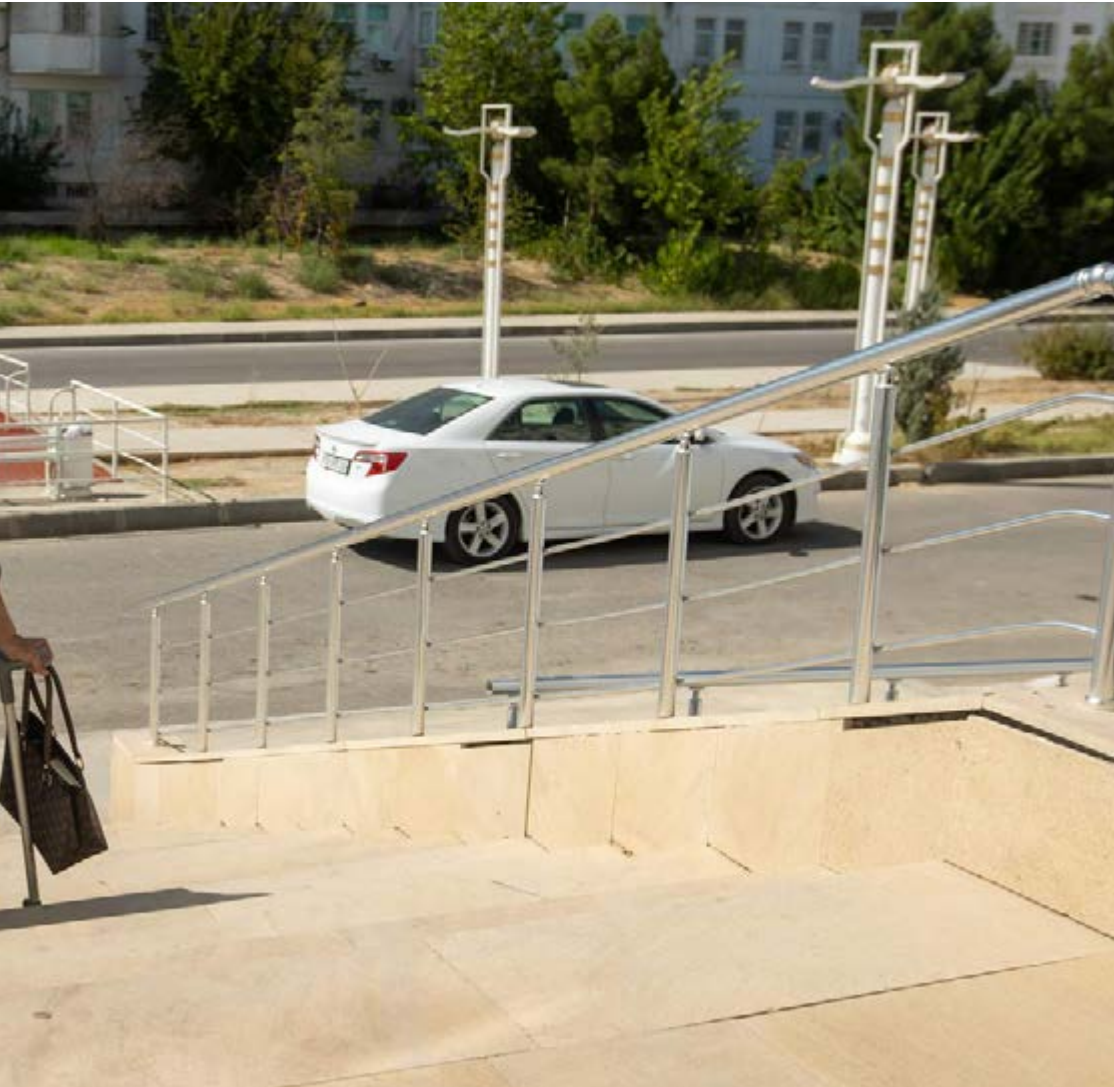
of Population of Turkmenistan at high level and the United Nations Resident Coordinator, and including representatives of all the national partners at Deputy Minister Level and Heads of UN Agencies – is in place. This Committee, as well as the Joint Programme Technical Working Group, forms a government inter-sectoral coordination mechanism to promote the further roll-out of community-based social services across Turkmenistan.

Socio-economic analysis

The Joint Programme has been designed with the aim of demonstrating the cost effectiveness and social value of the new model of social services to support the adoption of evidence-based decisions on the financing of new models in the near future and to widen their use to the whole country, including etrap social work services. In this context, socio-economic analysis was carried out of traditional and new social services at the local level, the preliminary findings of which suggest that, despite their short-term nature, the provision of new specialized social services helped to improve the quality of life of users of these services in their communities, to restore and preserve family ties, as well to changes the attitudes of communities themselves towards vulnerable populations.

After discussion with key national partners, this analysis, as well as other surveys and studies produced under the Joint Programme – based on statistical data disaggregated by sex, age, vulnerability and geographic location – will be submitted to the government for consideration and informed decisions on the transformation of the system for providing social services, including funding for social workers at local level. and the inclusion of the necessary expenditure items in the state budget for 2023.

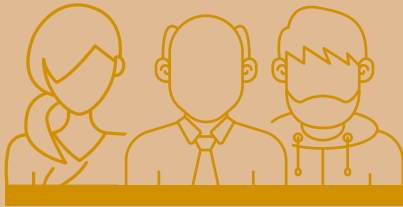




Only a month after the beginning of a component of the Joint Programme, about 23 adults with disabilities in Ashgabat were being provided with social services, helping them to live independently. The coordinator of the service, Guljahan Tanalova, herself has a disability resulting from a musculoskeletal disorder. Following training in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan on independent living skills and developing the potential of women with disabilities, she realized she could do more for herself and others in Turkmenistan.

The new social service for adults with disabilities, funded by UNDP, is one of the 12 specialized social services piloted as part of the Joint Programme. It was to ensure that people with disabilities would not require residential institutional care, but with the support of personal assistants would be able to overcome difficult life situations and realize their own potential and live independently. Persons with disabilities in need of personal assistance services may apply to Yenme (the organization providing the service) directly, or social work specialists may refer them to this service. Tanalova and her team assess individual needs together with a potential service user and relevant specialists in such areas as family health or recreation and fitness.

[Read more on UN Turkmenistan's website](#)



COMPONENT

3

Improving the system of social protection

through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services

National social work and
social service workforce
capacity strengthened





Training on theory and practice of social work

To strengthen the capacity of the national social work and social services, a series of large-scale training events was held in five regions and Ashgabat on the theory and practice of social work, over the course of eight months. In total, the Joint Programme has built the capacity of more than 300 social workers in Turkmenistan, including new social workers, persons from allied professions (including trusteeship and guardianship bodies, inspectorates on juvenile affairs, the police, narcological clinics, and the health and education sector), managers and employees of state and non-governmental social service providers, who have become familiar with the basics and practical aspects of social work and were able to apply the acquired knowledge and skills during practical work on the ground, including piloting new social services. All the social service providers also completed basic training on specific types of specialized services organized by UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC and UNICEF.

In the framework of the Joint Programme, a cohort of university teachers was also trained, who in turn will teach an intensive course of social work theory and practice from 2022. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a module on Telepractice, distance social service provision and Mental Health support was included into the capacity building training for the social workforce, with participation of the Ministry of Labour, social workers, academicians, and CSO staff.

Curriculum development

To ensure the sustainability of the social services workforce and to further develop human resources, the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan and leading national universities are working in the auspices of the Joint Programme to develop a higher education curriculum on social work as a profession. The social work degree course will be based on a curriculum that builds on the theories, concepts and principles of social work developed within the Joint Programme (including being rights-based, person-centred, strengths-based and based on needs assessments and case management methods that take into account theories of human development, participation and empowerment). The curriculum is aligned with international standards but builds also on the social work practice that has been developing in Turkmenistan so is adapted as far as possible to the emerging system of quality community-based social services in Turkmenistan and the local legal, social and cultural context.

A pool of social work trainers and teachers are currently being trained and supported to finalize syllabi and prepare to teach social work degrees. The opening of a bachelor's degree course in social work is currently being considered. The MLSP has made the official request that will ensure funding for these places.



Mergen Sahetliyev of Ashgabat, who had tertiary qualifications in psychology, decided to take a new professional path. Successfully completing a rigid recruitment process he became one of the 45 social workers employed by the MLSP as part of the Joint Programme.

As one of the first social workers in Turkmenistan, Mergen not only provides

social services to families in difficult life situations, but is also an active member of a group of theorists and practitioners of social work services, sharing irreplaceable practical knowledge with the teaching staff of universities. In this way, he is contributing to the establishment of the Turkmen vocational school of social work and the development of educational programmes in Turkmen universities in the field of social work.

[Read more on UN Turkmenistan's website](#)

Lessons learned

1

For the best possible results, it is important to have high-level intersectoral buy in – the Joint Programme benefitted substantially from intersectoral coordination at leadership level

2

From the outset, the United Nations worked to ensure that social workers were employed technically and logistically by the government: this meant that the process of ensuring sustainability after the programme ended was made much easier.

3

The Social Code has been reviewed and amendments suggested for endorsement by the Government.

4

The restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic began almost immediately after the Joint Programme was initiated. This forced the JP team to be creative and redesign the whole training system into an online form. This had several advantages, including enabling national partners to connect online for meetings and discussions, saving travel costs of the international consultants, and enabling support to continue over a longer period than that planned for the working visits. However, it also had disadvantages, including the fact that it was not possible to embed international experts to support social workers and social service providers and provide more in-depth support at this early stage of practice development..

5

The Joint Programme facilitated broader understanding among government partners of the broad range of vulnerable groups requiring social services. While previously there had just been a focus the elderly and persons with disabilities, now government planning includes other vulnerable groups such as families with children, young people leaving care, women experiencing to domestic violence, persons affected by alcohol and drug addiction, and adolescents at risk of coming into contact with the law.

6

The focus on evidence-based decision making in the Joint Programme has been adopted and is being implemented by government partners from line ministries, who are now using more policy briefs and evidence from the field in their documents.



Looking forward

As the Joint Programme was designed based on the national priorities and are in line with the strategic National Socio-Economic Development plan for 2019-2025, one of the biggest achievements is that the government takes full ownership over the programme results. There is a demonstrated ownership from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of Turkmenistan over the programme results in general, from the Mejlis (Parliament) of Turkmenistan with regards to the new Law on Social Services, and buy-in for budget allocation with the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan

The MLSP is leading the ongoing development of social services, and MoE of Turkmenistan, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Turkmenistan, and Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan all have mandates and roles in social service development and delivery in the new Law on Social Services. It is expected that cross-ministry leadership will be provided by the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan as set out in the Law and in the draft National Social Services Development Plan 2022-2030.

The evidence from social worker assessments and socio-economic analysis will inform government planning for social services development, including funding of the planned national roll-out of the community based social worker service piloted by the Joint Programme, and implementation of the new Law on Social Services beyond the lifetime of the Joint Programme.

The new Law has helped the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) to establish an appropriate funding mechanism to institutionalize new social worker positions at scale. This should then be scaled up by 2025 to fulfil the commitments under the existing national plans concerning development and human rights, including those concerning children, women and persons with disabilities.



CALCULATION OF SOCIAL WORKER REQUIREMENTS

Preliminary analysis of the assessments conducted by the etrap social work specialists found that:

- **6 per cent** of the people assessed required urgent, critical interventions to support them in situations of crisis. Most of the people assessed were identified from the list of recipients of social assistance.
- A further **32 per cent** required support plans as they were in difficult life situations.
- This meant that a total of **38 per cent** of benefits recipients required additional services and support beyond benefits.
- The initial plan developed by the United Nations and the Government of Turkmenistan is that social workers should be in place to meet the needs of the **6 per cent** of benefits recipients that require urgent critical interventions.
- As roughly **1 in 6** of the population receive benefits, this represents **1 per cent** of the total population.
- If one etrap social worker can manage a generalist case load (of children, adults and elderly persons) of 75 cases per year (25 cases intensively supported for six months = 50 per year and 25 cases being monitored with less intensity = 75 per year) this leads to **807 etrap social workers** needed to reach 1 per cent of the population, or **1 social worker per 7,476 population**

Ministry	Potential requirement for social workers, 2022-2030	Proposal	
1	MLSP: Social workers in etraps	807	1 per 7,476 population (minimum requirement for basic coverage)
2	MLSP: Centres	90	15 social workers in every velayat centre
3	MLSP: residential institutions	27	3 social workers in each of 9 institutions for adults and infants
4	Ministry of Education: residential institutions; medical-pedagogical commissions, special needs education	122	3 social workers in each of 17 children's institutions 2 social workers in each of 6 medical-pedagogical commissions 1 social worker per etrap for special needs education
5	Ministry of Internal Affairs: youth and groups at risk of domestic violence	59	1 social worker per etrap
6	Other specialized services piloted in the Joint Programme	136	100 for services for youth and children 36 for gender-based violence and reproductive health services
Total:	1,241	This total equates to 1 social worker per 5,077 population by 2030	

At end of year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Number of social workers	45	45	176	391	563	700	810	898	968	1,025
Newly certified MLSP social workers		140	250	250						
University social work graduates					250	250	250	250	250	250
Number of social workers leaving the profession (20% per year)		-9	-35	-78	-113	-140	-162	-180	-194	-205
Total	45	176	391	563	700	810	898	968	1025	1070

With support from the Joint Programme, the MLSP has calculated the number of social workers who will be required each year to meet its targets. The MLSP is already using the National Social Services Development Plan 2022-2030 to ensure that social services development will be firmly on the government's development agenda through to 2050. The 45 social worker positions have been added to the MLSP budget for 2022, and it is anticipated that this can be at least doubled if not trebled for the 2023 budget.

The MLSP is considering how to establish a training and capacity building unit that can train new social workers both to replace those who have left and the new intake.

The MLSP has developed a career progression mechanism for promoting social workers to 'senior social worker' and 'supervisor' positions – the Joint Programme will support MLSP to train in managing supervisions. This will help to ensure improved recruitment and retention of social workers.

The Joint Programme is also making steps to address certain social issues in Turkmenistan. The pilot services revealed a need for all the new services to be expanded throughout the country. Improvement of national legislation is necessary not only for the development of the specialized intersectoral services, but also, among other things, to promote the mechanism of state tenders. This is necessary for introduction of these specialized services in the state and non-governmental service sector and their expansion to other regions of the country where they are not currently available.

Meanwhile, all specialized services now have sets of rules and regulations that can be used by the MLSP to institutionalize them and secure funding. By June 2022, the socio-economic analysis and final analytical report will be available to support the ongoing effort to institutionalize specialized services. A National Plan for Social Services Development has been proposed to the MLSP and is being used for long-term planning. This includes measures for enshrining all services at regulatory and policy level, and moving towards institutionalization of social services.

Following the introduction of the Law on Social Services, work is ongoing to strengthen the regulatory system for social services, and to ensure that new elements, such as a strengthened child protection system, the possibility of using state social contracting (tendering) for the provision of social services and the improvement of national legislation to ensure protection for and support of women and children facing domestic violence.





