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# Analysis of the state system in Uzbekistan to promote an integrated approach in employment and welfare services delivery for persons with disabilities

## Analytical Report

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EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY AND RESEARCH

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The European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research has been commissioned by the UNDP to carry out research, analysis and mapping of integrated approaches applied in employment and welfare services in Uzbekistan within the joint initiative of the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan and UNDP “Addressing socio-economic inequalities in a time of global and regional instabilities”.

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## Table of Content

1	Introduction .....	5
2	The situation of persons with disabilities, national legislation and policy framework .....	6
2.1	Employment .....	6
2.2	Social protection .....	11
3	Application of integrated case management in Uzbekistan.....	14
4	Promising international practices.....	18
4.1	Case management model in Lithuania.....	19
4.2	Active Inclusion Integration Platform (AIIP) in Kosovo .....	21
4.3	Integrated Social Service Centres (ISCCs) in Armenia .....	23
4.4	Job Carving and Job Crafting in Malta.....	24
5	Policy recommendations .....	26
6	Conclusions .....	32
7	References and further reading.....	33

## List of Abbreviations

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
BB countries	Bridge Building countries of the European Centre
CSW	Centres for Social Work
European Centre	European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research
EU	European Union
ICM	Integrated Case Management
ILO	International Labour Organization
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NASP	National Agency for Social Protection
PES	Public Employment Service
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP RBEC	United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Europe and The Commonwealth of Independent States
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UZSTAT	Statistics Agency under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
WB	World Bank

## Executive Summary

*The government of Uzbekistan is engaged in drafting and implementing reforms and strategies in employment and social protection by introducing integrated approaches. The situation of vulnerable groups of society, especially persons with disabilities, however, is of concern in many respects including their disadvantage in the integration into the labour market. Social and labour market services are still scattered and targeted employment measures for persons with disabilities frequently missing. There is a need for comprehensive and well-coordinated programs and partnership between stakeholders in employment and social welfare. Vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities should be supported more holistically on their path to integration into society and the labour market, including an integrated case management approach.*

# 1 Introduction

This analytical report is prepared as part of the project *“Addressing socio-economic inequalities in a time of global and regional instabilities,”* a joint initiative of the government of Uzbekistan and the UNDP. The project aims to contribute to inclusive, resilient economic growth and reduced regional inequalities by improving capacities of public institutions and private entities and developing policies to support job creation and employment opportunities. In this regard, adopting an integrated approach in employment and welfare service delivery would help the government of Uzbekistan to ensure that citizens have access to a range of services needed to address the barriers they face.

The European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (European Centre) has been commissioned by the UNDP to carry out research, analysis and mapping of integrated approaches applied in employment and welfare service delivery in Uzbekistan with a focus on enhancing employability of persons with disabilities. By offering services, the European Centre provides guidance towards integrated policies based on UNDP’s technical leadership in integrated case management between employment and social protection, in particular.<sup>1</sup>

The project objectives are to 1) conduct overall assessment of the current existing mid-term or longer-term state programs in social protection and labour systems with a focus on persons with disabilities; 2) analyse the current system of employment services for persons with disability regarding integrated case management; 3) carry out desk research on international promising practices;) 4) contribute to the design of a pilot by suggesting an integrated service delivery model; and 5) carry out trainings in the format of a train-the-trainer model.

The report at hand is the first analytical deliverable offered to the UNDP and the government of Uzbekistan. It aims to set the overall frame for designing pilots at local governance level in Tashkent. To build a common understanding among stakeholders for an Integrated Case Management (ICM) model to be applied, the European Centre explored perceptions of different stakeholders during a mission in April 2024, which included a participatory ICM Scoping workshop and a workshop with national stakeholders. Recommendations for piloting ICM in Uzbekistan will build on findings gathered during this mission and will be included in the analytical paper to be drafted in May 2024. Finally, trainings will be conducted with key staff of the pilots and other people.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, UNDP/ILO/ADA project 'Promoting Inclusive Labour Market Solutions in the Western Balkans' (<https://www.undp.org/eurasia/projects/promoting-inclusive-labour-market-solutions-western-balkans-phase-ii>)

This analytical report builds on desk research, including a review of relevant government and legal acts, academic papers, reports and websites. It is structured as follows: after the introduction, the situation of persons with disabilities, national legislation and the policy framework are presented in chapter 2. Chapter 3 informs on findings of the analysis for a (potential) application of ICM in Uzbekistan. International practices are presented in chapter 4 and policy recommendations provided in chapter 5. This is followed by conclusions (chapter 6).

## 2 The situation of persons with disabilities, national legislation and policy framework

In this report, **ICM is understood as an *innovative practice employed collectively by the agencies of employment and social security to serve the most vulnerable with all available resources from both the labour market and the social protection system, and even beyond.***<sup>2</sup> It distinguishes from the case management approach implemented, for instance, in social service by applying case management specifically at the interface of the policy area of employment and social protection and thus offering a holistic approach to managing cases.

The section presents a brief overview of the national legislation and policy framework in the core policy fields of such ICM (employment and social protection), with the focus on persons with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 Employment

On 15 October 2020, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan signed the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Government of Uzbekistan, 2020b), which incorporates international standards and the requirements of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (ILO, 2020).<sup>4</sup> A

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<sup>2</sup> This definition was already used within the projects *Improving coordination of social protection and employment service delivery in Armenia and Tajikistan* (see <https://www.euro.centre.org/projects/detail/4261>) and *Integrated Case Management for Employment and Social Welfare Users in the Western Balkans* (see <https://www.euro.centre.org/projects/detail/205>).

<sup>3</sup> As was agreed between partners during the kick-off meeting (11 January 2024).

<sup>4</sup> <https://lex.uz/acts/1446995>; Uzbekistan is a party to seven of the nine core international human rights treaties and is constantly expanding its treaty obligations. Uzbekistan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in June 2021 (UN General Assembly, 2023).

National Action Plan (NAP) on the implementation of the CRPD has been signed for 2023–2025.<sup>5</sup> This NAP is expected to operationalise the CRPD in all policy areas and domains (WB, 2023).

Uzbekistan’s population is 34.6 million people. 60% of them are under 30 years old (WB Group, 2022). According to the CERR and UNDP Country Office in Uzbekistan (2023) around 18.4% of the adult population (4.2 million) are multidimensionally poor.<sup>6</sup> There were 13.7 million people employed in the economy and 1.3 million unemployed persons in 2022.<sup>7</sup> The numbers of employed persons with disabilities varies between sources and range between 5% (ILO, 2020) and 7% (UN Uzbekistan, 2019) of disabled working age population. Data however show that persons with disabilities are four times less likely to be employed than persons without disabilities.<sup>8</sup> Notably, the situation is worse in rural areas where only 5.8% are employed and only 4.4% of women with disabilities are in the workforce compared to 8.9% of men with disabilities (Yusupov & Abdukhalilov, 2022 in referring to UN Uzbekistan, 2019).

**Table 1: Key data Uzbekistan**

Indicators	Data	Sources and remarks
<b>Population</b>	34.6 million	WB Group (2022)
	60% are below 30 years old	
	13.7 million people are employed	2022 (latest data available); UZSTAT
	1.3 million are unemployed	2022 (latest data available); UZSTAT
	4.2 million (18.4%) of adult population are multidimensionally poor	Multidimensional Poverty Index for Uzbekistan (CERR and UNDP UZB, 2023)
<b>Persons with disabilities</b>	845,300 people with certification (2,3%)	WB, 2023
	287.763 beneficiaries of disability group I and II	NASP (2024)
	162,200 persons (25%) from all three disability groups were recognised as ‘fit for work’	WB Group, 2022

<sup>5</sup> See for instance <https://labourcentralasia.org/en/news/uzbekistan-we-now-have-rights-but-how-to-implement-them/?f=sANwmylp>

<sup>6</sup> UN entities have launched a joint initiative to establish a Multidimensional Poverty Index for Uzbekistan. The index should enable better pro-poor policy formulation measures and improve social protection mechanisms. Please see also here: <https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MPI/UZB.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> According to the Uzbekistan Statistics Agency, the employment rate (as ratio of the number of people in employed to the working-age population) was 67.2% in 2022 and the unemployment rate 8.9%; please see <https://stat.uz/en/official-statistics/labor-market> (Data as of 28 July 23).

<sup>8</sup> <https://disabilityin.org/country/uzbekistan/>



	21,100 (6% of the 162,200) are officially employed	WB Group, 2022
	5-7% of people with disabilities of working age are employed	ILO, 2020; UN Uzbekistan, 2019

The three disability categories assigned (I, II and III disability groups) are associated with the degree of loss of capacity to work. The responsible state body is the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP). The Uzbekistan Medical Social Expert Commissions (MSEC) are implementing the disability assessment and provide disability certificates containing professional as well as labour recommendations. In December 2022, 845,300 people were certified as having a disability, representing 2.3% of the total population (WB, 2023). According to NASP (2024) there are 287,763 beneficiaries of disability group I and II who receive payments. According to NASP<sup>9</sup>, MSECs recommends industries where persons with disabilities can work but usually considers persons with certain types of impairments ‘unemployable’ (WB Group, 2022). Only persons of group III are considered partly capable to work.<sup>10</sup> However, less than 162,200 persons from all three disability groups were recognised as ‘fit for work’; they account for about 25% of all registered adults with disabilities in Uzbekistan. Of these, roughly 6% (21,100) are officially employed. Other sources claim the average is 2% (WB Group, 2022). It is frequently this label that restricts the formal employment of persons and makes them dependent on disability benefits, as reported by participants of the survey conducted by Yusupov & Abdukhalilov (2022).

Despite the ratification of the UN CRPD, the legal definition of disability is still conflated with physical, intellectual, mental and sensory impairments in Uzbekistan, informs Yusupov & Abdukhalilov (2022). Many participants of a survey conducted by Yusupov & Abdukhalilov (2022) confirmed that the current legal and policy framework, as well as the design of the social protection system, have become the most significant barrier to disability inclusion in the labour market of Uzbekistan. The scholars suggests that the government should radically reform the existing institutional and policy framework of disability assessment and social protection and enable access of person with disabilities to the labour market. This can be achieved through meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities in the decision-making processes and collaboration with their representative organisations to remove all existing barriers (Yusupov & Abdukhalilov, 2022).

In Uzbekistan, disability is still legally intertwined with illness and an inability to work. Persons with disabilities can formally register as unemployed but are not eligible for unemployment benefits at the same time as they receive disability benefits (ILO,

<sup>9</sup> Information received by NASP on 12 March 2024.

<sup>10</sup> It is noticeable that negative language is used (“partly lost their ability to work”) which might refer to the still practiced ‘medical model’ of disability assessment (compared to the ‘social model’ more recently introduced in Uzbekistan).

UNICEF & WB, 2020). Consequently, many persons experience institutional and structural barriers to entering the labour market on an equal basis with others (WB Group, 2022). The current design of the social protection system furthermore discourages persons with disabilities from being employed in the open labour market. Disability benefits are not provided as compensation for disability-related costs but as a form of a monthly income. Employed persons with disabilities also fear losing their benefits during their regular MSEC medical assessments and therefore tend to work more in the informal sector where discrimination is worse and salaries are roughly half of those in the formal sector (WB Group, 2022; see also UN, 2022). Nevertheless, all the benefits of employed persons with disabilities are preserved; disability allowance is lost only when moving from the disability group II to III.<sup>11</sup>

The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Government of Uzbekistan, 2020b) requires local government bodies to establish the minimum number of workplaces for the employment of persons with disabilities in the amount of at least 3% of the total number of employees.<sup>12</sup> The law obliges public institutions and private enterprises, where at least 20 individuals are employed, to reserve jobs for persons with disabilities.<sup>13</sup> However, disability employment quotas are not enforced and there is no monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanism in place, making it difficult for the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction (MEPR)<sup>14</sup> to assess the effectiveness of this policy (WB, 2023). The Labour Inspection under the MEPR has limited staff and capacity to monitor and enforce the employment quota (Yusupov & Abdukhililov, 2022). Due to the lack of data and monitoring of the quota system it is difficult to assess whether the quota system has been effective to secure employment for persons with disabilities in Uzbekistan.

Evidence on quota systems applied in EU countries shows that fulfilment of the quota varies between 30% and 70% (Fuchs, 2014). Even in countries with relatively high fulfilment, such as Austria, Germany and France where there are sanctions for non-compliance, quotas are only partially filled (Fuchs, 2014; ILO, 2019). While quota systems are relatively simple to implement and place a low burden on public finances, available empirical data indicates only small net employment gains (Fuchs, 2014; ILO, 2019). As the quota can be filled by already employed persons who become disabled, they are more likely to be retained in the job as opposed to be filled by hiring a disabled jobseeker (Fuchs, 2014). Also, sanctions applied in case of unfilled quota in the form of levies or fines, represent a minor cost for employers compared to costs involved in workplace adaptations (ILO, 2019). A comparison of employment levels

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<sup>11</sup> Information received by UNDP Uzbekistan on 12 March 2024.

<sup>12</sup> <https://labourcentralasia.org/en/news/uzbekistan-we-now-have-rights-but-how-to-implement-them/?f=sANwmylp>

<sup>13</sup> <https://disabilityin.org/country/uzbekistan/>

<sup>14</sup> Former Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR)

of persons with disabilities across OECD countries found no correlation between employment quotas and higher employment rates (OECD, 2010).

Although incentives are provided to enterprises when hiring a person with disability (e.g. tax incentives such as flat tax rate for individual entrepreneurs, wage subsidies, subsidies to cover the costs of adapting jobs for persons with disabilities), the respective section of preferential treatment of persons with disabilities in the Labour Code of Uzbekistan<sup>15</sup> could discourage employers to hire them (WB Group, 2022; Yusupov & Abdukhalilov, 2022). Negative stereotypes and prejudices further affect opportunities for persons with disabilities in finding a job. As mentioned above, quotas tend to provide little incentive for employers to hire disabled jobseekers and might even limit their chances to gain employment in the open labour market. The Labour Code provides additional measures of positive discrimination including the entitlement to full-time salary while working, reduced working hours, extended annual leave and other privileges (Yusupov & Abdukhalilov, 2022; WB Group, 2022).

Employment policy is part of social protection in Uzbekistan with employment targets being included in the National Social Protection Strategy and its goals (Government of Uzbekistan, 2022d; see below). The Public Employment Service (PES) forms part of the MEPR, which oversees activities of the 14 regional and 206 district PES centres.

It was noted by ILO that the PES is not yet delivering all core functions of a modern public employment service (ILO, 2020). Moreover, there are only limited Active Labour Market Programs (ALMP) available, comprising mainly the public works program (which absorbs the highest share of funding) and the training/retraining program (ILO, 2021). Targeted employment measures for persons with disabilities are frequently missing and 'disability mainstreaming'<sup>16</sup> not practised. According to the targets set by the government of Uzbekistan (2022b) 12,146 persons with disabilities should have received employment support in 2022, of which 3,759 placed in vacancies<sup>17</sup> and reserved jobs, 2,993 persons received vocational and entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy training, 3,010 been involved in paid community service and 2,384 been engaged in subsidized employment.<sup>18</sup>

The PES is responsible for the administration of the quota system and for the registration of the unemployed. The institution is reported to undertake registration mainly as an administrative task for job referrals rather than an individualised service

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<sup>15</sup> Government of Uzbekistan, 2022e.

<sup>16</sup> In accordance with Principle 2 "Facilities and services must be universally accessible to ensure equal access to justice without discrimination of persons with disabilities" of the International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities – please see [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disability/SR\\_Disability/GoodPractices/Access-to-Justice-EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disability/SR_Disability/GoodPractices/Access-to-Justice-EN.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> An online vacancy database is available at <https://ish.mehnat.uz/>

<sup>18</sup> See also Presidential Decree No. PQ-57 dated December 21, 2021 "On additional measures to provide comprehensive support to persons with disabilities, support their employment, and further increase their social activity".

to clients (ILO, 2021). PES are noted to not adequately classify clients due to e.g. a missing distinction between unemployed persons and jobseekers. Information generated by the PES system is reported by the ILO to not be systematized, analysed, or disseminated and not used to guide and change program delivery. Also, counselling and guidance are not tailored to the individual needs of jobseekers. Services provided to employers are minimal, limited to job vacancy registration and to the legal requirements for recruitment (ILO, 2021). PES officials note the limited number of job vacancies reported to the PES despite an employer obligation to do so (ILO, 2021). There is very limited staff employed at regional/local PES offices. Skills of employment counsellors might need to be updated to respond to the varied needs of target groups adequately and effectively. Finally, data problems persist. For example, there is no information found on the transition of the unemployed into employment. Such data inadequacies restrict adequate monitoring and evaluation of the PES performance (ILO, 2021). A general conclusion drawn by ILO (2021) is that the PES is serving a small segment of its potential market. Nevertheless, according to ILO (2020), the MEPR is expanding both passive and active labour market measures.

Monocenters (Ishga Markhamat) are part of the structural system of the MEPR, having the status of a legal entity (limited liability company).<sup>19</sup> They provide services, particularly training, to the unemployed population. On April 13, 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Monocenter “Ishga Markhamat” in Tashkent and the Public Association of Disabled People “Sharoit plus”<sup>20</sup> in Tashkent. The purpose of this cooperation is to train persons with disabilities modern professions and provide them with comprehensive support in finding decent work in the open labour market.<sup>21</sup> As one of its measures, Sharoit plus has a disability-inclusive recruitment portal.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2 Social protection

The National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS,) which was adopted in 2022 and runs until 2030, sets out priority areas and goals for social protection with the aim to ensure a minimum level of social protection for all citizens. In line with the strategy, the country has introduced several legislative and policy changes in the governance, financing and provision of social welfare to expand social protection coverage of the population with special focus on socially vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities. These reforms were necessitated by the low coverage of the social protection system. According to a joint report of ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank

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<sup>19</sup> <https://mehnat.uz/en/subordinate-organizations/position/248>

<sup>20</sup> <https://sharoitplus.uz/en/about-us/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://sharoitplus.uz/en/sharoit-plus-signed-a-memorandum-of-understanding-with-the-monocenter-ishga-markhamat/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://ishplus.uz/summaries?lang=en>

(2020), 55% of the population was covered by the social protection system, primarily through social insurance that reached 44% of the population, and one out of three persons living in poverty received some of the existing social protection benefits.<sup>23</sup> Regarding persons with disabilities, based on administrative data of the 484,000 registered persons with disabilities receiving one of three main disability benefits, 66% received the contributory social insurance Disability Pension, 30% received the Disability Allowance for those who have been recognized as having a disability since childhood and only 4% had access to the Disability Social Pension (WB Group, 2022). According to the WB Group (2022), persons with disabilities and their families reported that the disability allowances were inadequate and did not consider the severity of impairments and the associated extra costs.

In order to expand social protection coverage, the strategy identifies the following priority areas: ensuring mandatory social guarantees and expanding social assistance programmes for families and persons in need; digitalising mandatory social guarantees; providing social services at the mahalla level; and improving state support for persons with disabilities including transition towards a social model for the assessment of disability, promoting labour market integration and access to rehabilitation and other means of social support.

Among the targets stated in the NSPS is the reduction of the overall poverty rate from 17% in 2021 to 5% by 2030, by increasing public spending on social protection (from 6% in 2020 to 7% by 2030) and increasing the share of low-income families receiving social assistance (from 59% in 2020 to 98% by 2030). Achieving these targets requires on effective coordination of different social protection programs and cooperation between institutions involved in the design and delivery at all governance levels.

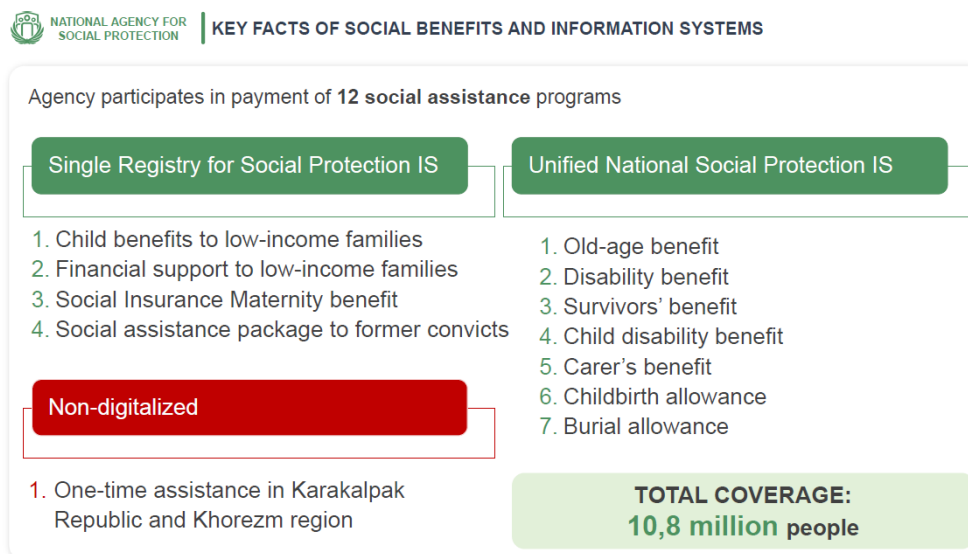
To this end, an important step taken by the government was to establish a single national body responsible for the development and implementation of social protection, the National Agency for Social Protection (NASP).<sup>24</sup> Figure 1 below presents the different benefits (including the disability benefit and the child disability benefit) under the mandate of the Agency, which currently provides coverage for 10,8 million people.

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<sup>23</sup> Social protection referred here includes social insurance, social assistance and labour market programmes.

<sup>24</sup> The legal framework for the provision of social protection is outlined by respective laws, presidential decrees and resolutions (see References). For example, the Law on social services for the elderly, disabled and other socially vulnerable categories of the population (Government of Uzbekistan, 2022/2016) prescribes the mandate of central and local government bodies in establishing, maintaining and funding social services.

**Figure 1: Overview of social benefit programmes**



Source: NASP, 2024

Another key measure concerns the creation of digital information systems, which includes the Unified Register of Social Protection, and the Single Registry (see Figure 1). The latter integrates 12 types of data gathered from different ministries and departments including income data, data on civil status, information on persons with disabilities such as disability group and duration, information on benefits.<sup>25</sup> This has already yielded positive results increasing the number of beneficiaries. In 2023, 10,8 million persons were in payment of 12 social assistance programs of the NASP (NASP, 2024). Also, the number of families and children that received social benefits and material support increased (e.g., the number of low-income families receiving child benefits and material support increased by 75%, from 1.2 million in 2021 to 2.1 million including 4.6 million children in 2022) (UN, 2022).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The 12 data types are (NASP, 2024): 1) Income (salaries, property income, other income specified by the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, entrepreneurial activity, including individual entrepreneurial activity); 2) Civil status (marriage registration, dissolution of marriage, information about birth and death); 3) Ownership of real estate; 4) On beneficiaries and amounts of pensions and benefits from the Pension Fund; 5) Sending electronic pre-payroll statements, returning unclaimed funds to the local budget; 6) Vehicle ownership (manufacturing date, plate registration number, technical condition, general power of attorney, type of vehicle); 7) Family members in prisons; 8) Services provided to the applicant/ family members by the labour authorities, participation in public works, recognition as unemployed, the amount of unemployment benefits paid, income from participation in public works; 9) Status of family members as students (higher education institution, college, technical school, lyceum, vocational school, field of study, course of study); 10) Paid and received alimonies; 11) Persons with disabilities (disability group and duration); 12) Financial securities (quantity and market value, nominal value is obtained in the absence of market value).

<sup>26</sup> Recent measures implemented to improve the delivery of social services at the local level include: 1) formalisation and professionalisation of social work, specifically legislation on establishing standards and criteria for social work was adopted; 2) implementing a new system of social services by setting-

Additional measures recently implemented to improve the delivery of social services at the local level include the formalisation and professionalisation of social work by adopting a guideline on standards and criteria for social work; providing trainings, including on case management, for those involved in the provision of social welfare services and benefits (see chapter 3 of the report); and implementing a new system of social services by setting-up INSON Social Service Centers at district level. INSON Social Service Centers are expected to be the focal points in local social services provision with community specialists acting as a bridge in providing integrated social protection tailored to the needs of individuals or family, including children and adults with disabilities. Among their tasks are outreach to the target group, i.e. identifying vulnerable groups eligible for social services, referring them to the respective public administration and informing citizens about benefits and services available to support them.

### 3 Application of integrated case management in Uzbekistan

Despite recent reform efforts in Uzbekistan, the above analysis of national legislation and the policy framework about persons with disabilities shows that further reforms are needed. **Social and labour market services are still scattered and coordination mechanism between institutions and policies of these two policy fields are frequently missing.** Case management pilots, primarily practised in Uzbekistan in the social field to provide integrated social services, might serve as important entry points for an integrated case management to be set up between employment and social policy.

The need for improved coordination of programs and between institutions is highlighted by many international organisations (ILO, 2021; ILO, UNICEF & WB, 2020; UNPRPD, 2022, WB Group, 2022, etc.). ILO, UNICEF & WB (2020), for instance, recommend enhanced coordination between programs and institutions concerning the NSPS. The situation analysis on persons with disabilities in Uzbekistan (UNPRPD, 2022) notes that multidisciplinary coordination among medical, rehabilitation, social support and education services is not adequate. As for employment, ILO reports on

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up Social Service Centers (INSON) at district level (in 2023, Social Service Centers were established in 28 districts and cities, however they still need to be rolled out nationally); and 3) providing trainings, including on case management, for those involved in the provision of social welfare services and benefits, namely social workers in the INSON Social Service Centers as well as community specialists working with vulnerable families at the mahallas.

limited coordination of labour market programs and “*too many isolated units responsible for portions of the delivery of PES services*” (ILO, 2021, p. 47).

Limited cooperation between employment and social policy programs and institutions at the central level has a vast impact on beneficiaries and on cooperation mechanisms practiced at sub-national levels such as between respective actors at mahalla level. There is a need for developing a **common understanding between actors at all levels of government that working on their own cannot solve complex societal problems such as inequality and poverty.**

Partnership is understood as an advanced form of cooperation (Scoppetta, 2013) and goes beyond relationships between public agencies. Partnership describes joint efforts taken by partners and includes, for instance, alliances with Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), specialised in providing support for persons with disabilities such as personal assistants of persons with disabilities and private firms offering jobs and tailoring workplaces for persons with disabilities that are adjusted to their specific needs (see ‘Job Carving and Job Crafting’ below). **Partnership is key in improving employment and social welfare policy delivery** and is practiced in many countries (see, for instance, Scoppetta et al, 2024; Davern et al, 2021; Scoppetta, 2013). Within the European Union (EU), working in partnership with stakeholders is one of the key principles of the management of EU funds and legally enshrined in the *European Code of Conduct on Partnership* (European Commission, 2014)<sup>27</sup>. Partnership is recognized in contributing to the UN Agenda 2030 and its SDGs. Goal 17 calls for revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development.<sup>28</sup>

Developing partnership where stakeholders join forces to better assist persons with disabilities throughout their entire integration chain is a precondition for ICM. As outlined above, ICM is understood as an **innovative practice employed collectively by actors to serve the most vulnerable with all available resources from both the labour market and the social protection system, and even beyond.** Institutions thereby liaise and contribute to ICM implementation with skills, time, funding, and knowledge to the benefit of the target group.

Currently, there is a lack of case-managed support for persons with disabilities at both micro and macro levels in Uzbekistan. In addition, integrated case management, i.e. a tailored service to the needs of individuals from both employment and social policy is not available. Evidence however suggests that case management is a particularly effective approach for people with disabilities, as they often require tailored and specialised supports and services from more than one provider (OECD, 2023).

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<sup>27</sup> The Code is intended to be revised. The DRAFT proposal builds on recommendations developed by subgroup members of the European Community of Practice on Partnership (ECoPP) - see: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/ecopp\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/ecopp_en).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships/>



As mentioned, the country's social and employment services are still fragmented and inadequate communication between various ministries and departments compromises their effectiveness and efficiency (WB Group, 2022). *"A well-coordinated legal and policy framework is necessary in order to achieve integration and strengthening of Uzbekistan's system of social protection at the strategic, institutional, and programme levels"* (ILO et al., 2020). Fostering interagency coordination is highly relevant to better assist persons in need at community level and support the country in its efforts to fully implement the CRPD. Next to enhanced coordination of programs developed in employment, social protection, health, education – to just name some of the relevant policy fields to better be coordinated amongst each other -, integrated case management is required.

**Case management in social services** is specifically recommended by various international organisations and scholars. UN Uzbekistan (2019), for instance, refers to community-based interventions and case management approaches that need to be developed and rolled out. Specific attention is thereby drawn on the need for case-managed social support of persons with disabilities. The use of the case management method is referred to in the Decree of the President in relation to the tasks of social workers employed in INSON Social Service Centers of the Agency's districts/cities specifically to organize the provision of social services at the mahalla level. Groups of social workers should *"organize effective work with needy segments of the population, including using the case management method"* (Government of Uzbekistan, 2023b).

In the WB's project 'Strengthening the Social Protection System' (2019-2024), the capacity of job counsellors at PES to conduct effective and sustainable job placement is aimed to be enhanced, with them paying special attention to disadvantaged groups (WB Group, 2022). This support includes developing a methodology for individualised case management and effective profiling tools and providing wage subsidies for employers hiring socially vulnerable jobseekers above the quota (WB Group 2022). The WB Group (2022) recommends strengthening social services and case management practices at community level by implementing the WHO community-based rehabilitation guidelines using existing community structures such as mahallas.

As part of the Joint Work Programme of UNDP, ILO, and UNICEF (2020-2022), a case management approach and model were introduced with the aim to facilitate *integrated provision of social services*.<sup>29</sup> The specific components of this work included the development of a concept note on applying case management in delivery of integrated social services and the drawing-up and signing of joint work plans. A pilot project was launched on case management together with the UNICEF in 2021 to test case management models for the integration of social services. The

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/press-releases/community-based-social-services-contribute-enhancing-social-protection-uzbekistan>

pilot covered 106 families, including 192 children (101 boys and 91 girls), inter alia 12 children with disabilities (8 boys, 4 girls). It started with a training course for specialists (see below) located in Tashkent city and Angren city. Moreover, training sessions were designed and provided to social sector managers in the pilot districts: these trainings aimed at familiarising participants with the case management approach, informing them about case management standards, and how they could apply these when providing social services. The participating specialists mainly worked with vulnerable population groups including persons with disabilities. The evaluation report on the Joint Work Programme informs that the pilot and trainings produced positive results. However, as of the time of the report, there was no scaling-up of the pilot on case management (Konterra group, 2022).<sup>30</sup>

The UN 2022 Annual country report on Uzbekistan (UN, 2023) also informs that case management for social workers who provide social services for families in need of social protection was rolled-out in 200 communities in the Surkhandarya region. 681 women activists and district-level specialists were trained in case management. More recently, as part of a bilateral work program between the NASP and the UNICEF (and supported by the EU), 3-day lasting training sessions were delivered for 350 specialists (e.g., local government officials, community social workers). The training focussed on effective case management in social work regarding child protection services (e.g., conducting needs assessments, skills in identifying vulnerable situations and providing support to families and children).<sup>31</sup>

**Although Uzbekistan has experiences with case management in providing integrated solutions in social services, they primarily link to social services and frequently miss an integrated approach applied between employment and social protection.** Nevertheless, these experiences are very valuable and might serve as important entry points for an integrated case management to be set up between employment and social policy (see below). Our review of literature on laws and policies, including mid-term and long-term state programs in social protection and labour systems, confirms the need for integrated approaches applied at various levels of governance. This includes strengthened cooperation between respective policy fields at the central level to provide integrated services to persons with disabilities that assist them in their integration pathway.

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<sup>30</sup>The lesson learnt by evaluators on the scaling up is as follows (Konterra group, 2022, page x): scaling up models require clear frameworks agreed with the Government since the onset of modelling intervention. Experience from modelling of approaches and mechanisms in Uzbekistan shows the relevance and need for a time-bound transition framework or a handover plan designed together with the Government. Such plans should contain clear milestones and benchmarks of what is desired to be achieved and how it would be scaled up. As such it should represent the foundation of modelling interventions. Such plans should be reviewed and discussed on a regular basis with national stakeholders is a good way forward to ensure scaling up of models.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/press-releases/strengthening-support-families-and-children-surkhandarya-region>

In the next section of the report, we describe promising international practices that provide insights into experiences of other countries when designing and implementing integrated services.

## 4 Promising international practices

Both ICM and partnership is frequently applied in UNECE countries (see, for instance, Akilova et al., no date; BIRTHA et al., 2022; Scoppetta & Sandu, 2022; Scoppetta et al., 2018; Stott & Scoppetta, 2011, 2013a and b). Numerous case management practices exist within Europe such as Digitalised Case Management in Denmark and Cooperation with clients with complex problems in Slovenia (Scoppetta & Sandu, 2022). Also, single points of contact are practiced (e.g., the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) reform<sup>32</sup>). The European Centre's Bridge Building (BB) countries<sup>33</sup>, employ specific partnership components such as open consultation mechanisms (e.g. Armenia), and multi-level governance (e.g. Kosovo). Efforts have been made by various actors including the European Centre<sup>34</sup> to assist the countries in applying ICM models, adapted to the countries' contexts and needs of the target groups.<sup>35</sup> Initiatives fostering intense collaboration between actors of several policy fields such as employment, social protection and local economic development, include, among others, the OECD LEED Forum on Partnership and Local Development<sup>36</sup>, the Partnership Brokers Association<sup>37</sup> (2019; Tennyson 2004, 2005) and the Partnering Initiative & UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)<sup>38</sup>. At national level, Partnerships in the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) Flanders can serve as an example (Meyers, 2023).

We present four promising practices below, which have been identified to assist the country in setting up ICM (see 4.1. and 4.3) and related required actions such as digital platforms accessible by municipalities (see 4.2) and targeted employment programs for persons with disabilities (see 4.4.). As informed above, **ICM is**

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.nav.no/hva-er-nav/en>

<sup>33</sup> The BB countries of the European Centre include from the Western Balkans Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia and from the Eastern Partnership countries Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (see <https://www.euro.centre.org/aboutus/bridging>).

<sup>34</sup> This includes UNDP, ILO, ADA (Austrian Development Agency) as well as the Austrian Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, *Improving coordination of social protection and employment service delivery in Armenia and Tajikistan* (<https://www.euro.centre.org/projects/detail/4261>) and *Integrated Case Management for Employment and Social Welfare Users in the Western Balkans* (<https://www.euro.centre.org/projects/detail/205>)

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/fr/cfe/leed/forumpartnerships.htm>

<sup>37</sup> <https://partnershipbrokers.org/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/guidebook>

understood as an *innovative practice employed collectively by the agencies of employment and social security to serve the most vulnerable with all available resources from both the labour market and the social protection system, and even beyond*. The examples are from Lithuania, Kosovo, Armenia and Malta and were selected based on their potential for transfer.

## 4.1 Case management model in Lithuania<sup>39</sup>

The practice serves as a promising practice for Uzbekistan regarding the case management approach applied **between employment and social policy** although the target group differs from that of Uzbekistan. Relevant key information is provided in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Key information on the practice in Lithuania**

<b>Key features</b>	Pilot implemented by PES as driver for case management
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to coordinate services and measures</li> <li>• to ensure close cooperation between authorities, NGOs and employers</li> <li>• to increase social and labour market integration of unemployed with multiple problems</li> </ul>
<b>Target group</b>	30+ years old long-term unemployed or unemployed, social support beneficiaries
<b>Year/Duration</b>	January 2020 - June 2022
<b>Partners</b>	Municipal administrations, PES, NGOs, and employers
<b>Outcome</b>	900 participants were engaged in the model
<b>Transferability elements</b>	Hands-on ICM model with partnership established between different actors including NGOs.

Source: Kamandulienė, 2022

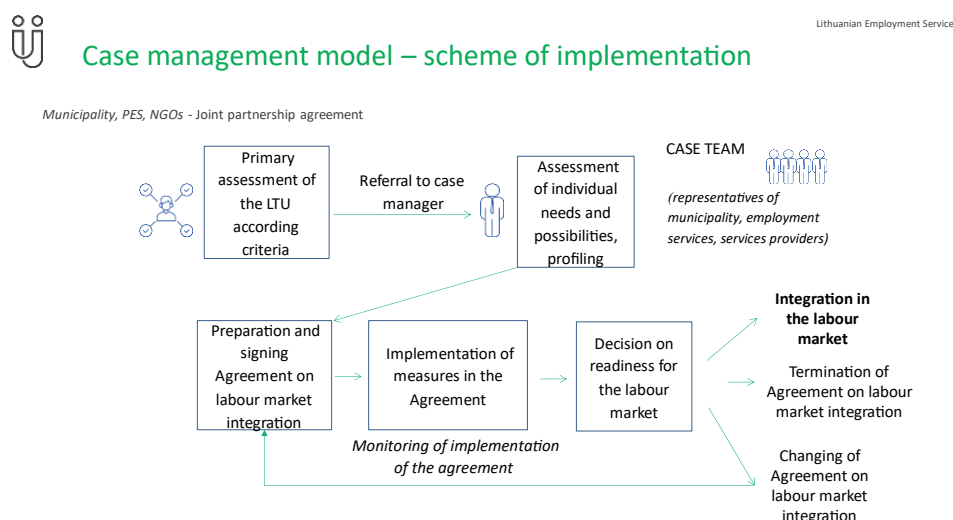
In Lithuania, several case management models are implemented, for example, in child welfare services for families with children and young people in vulnerable situations (OECD, 2023). The aims of the case management pilot described here, implemented under the lead of the PES, were to coordinate services and measures provided jointly by municipalities and PES and to ensure close cooperation between authorities, NGOs and employers with the purpose to increase social and labour market integration of unemployed with multiple problems. The model used a single point of contact, enabled for intensive support and activation and applied an individual approach with personalised plans.

<sup>39</sup> Unless mentioned otherwise, the information presented here derives from the Power Point slides of the PES Lithuania (Kamandulienė, 2022).

A partnership agreement was signed between partners (municipal administrations, PES, NGOs and employers). Regulations supported pilot implementation. The target group included 30+ years old long-term unemployed and social support beneficiaries as well as the unemployed receiving a job search allowance. The pilot engaged 900 participants and ran for 2.5 years (January 2020 - June 2022). PES and almost all municipalities have dedicated case workers to support service users – including the involvement of in-house specialists to assist with more complex cases (OECD, 2023).

The model aimed at tracking and providing sustainable employment (see Figure 2). Jobseekers were selected by using the PES information system via a data exchange with the Social Insurance Fund and municipalities, by results of evaluation of employment possibilities and by direct contacts with social support offices on possible candidates. Sustainable employment was targeted by 30% of participants employed within 28 days after participation in the project activities and, as an additional challenge, to maintain at least 25% of participants employed for 6 months.

**Figure 2: Lithuania's Case management model**



Source: PowerPoint used by Lithuania's PES (Kamandulienė, 2022)

According to the PES, the strengths of the model are the coordination of municipal and PES support and the involvement of NGOs. They helped to overcome the capacity that PES might lack. The reported weaknesses were the lack of a common IT platform to keep records (see therefore the example of the AIIP platform below) and to make reporting easier and the difficult target group which came with high costs of integration. The PES stresses the necessity for the understanding of all partners of the urgency of moving from benefits to employment and highlights that realistic performance targets should be set. Tracking the content of the activities was implemented by partners including “soft” results and individual progress.

Transferability elements of the practice for the Uzbekistan context include the applied hands-on ICM model and partnership established between different actors including NGOs.

## 4.2 Active Inclusion Integration Platform (AIIP) in Kosovo

Although the target group of this practice is jobseekers in general, the practice serves as a promising practice for Uzbekistan due to **the integrated platform applied between social protection and employment** in Kosovo. While the “Social Protection Single Registry” applied in Uzbekistan is part of the overall strategy of reforming the social protection system in the country, the aim of the AIIP is to foster institutionalised models of integrated and user centred provision of services for marginalised groups through the PES and Centres of Social Work. Moreover, it includes different levels and entities of governance (e.g. municipalities). Relevant key information is provided in table 3 below.

**Table 3: Key information on the practice in Kosovo**

<b>Key features</b>	Integrated platform used by institutions and providing the (employment and social welfare) history of jobseekers
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to foster institutionalised models of integrated and user centred provision of services for marginalised groups through the PES and CSW's</li> <li>• to enhance capacities and resources to develop and implement inclusive employment initiatives of local multi-stakeholder partnerships</li> </ul>
<b>Target group</b>	Jobseekers
<b>Year/Duration</b>	Starting in 2020
<b>Partners</b>	Centres for Social Work (CSW), the PES and offices in 37 municipalities, Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers
<b>Transferability elements</b>	To be checked in more detail regarding AIIP features that are of potential interest to Uzbekistan (e.g. digitalising processes within the PES; coordination/implementation of the Youth Guarantee Scheme, usage by municipalities, etc.).

Source: Scoppetta et al., 2024

The AIIP is an initiative that builds on a joint ICM project between the Kosovo government and the UNDP, ILO and the European Centre implemented in the Western Balkans in 2019.<sup>40</sup> The platform is based on a cooperation between the

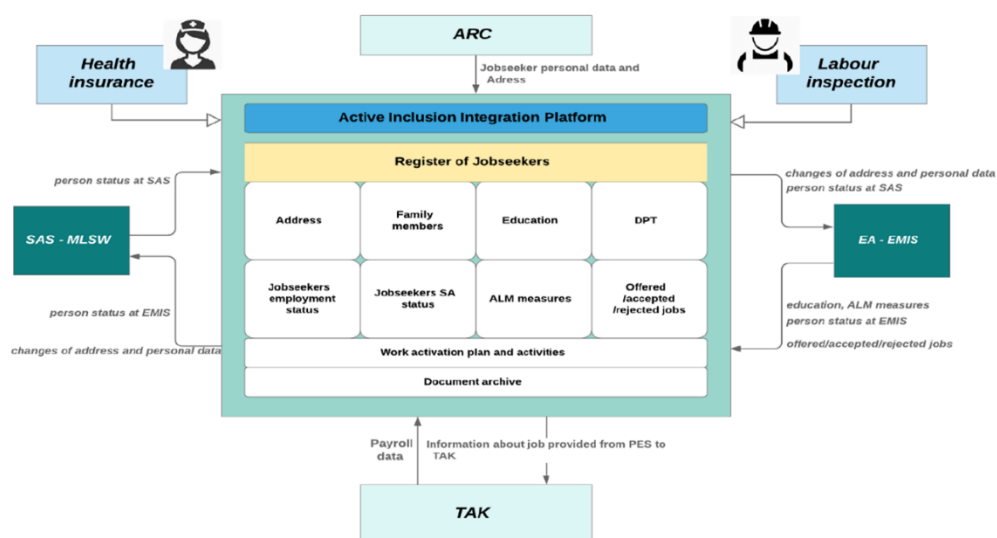
<sup>40</sup> <https://www.euro.centre.org/projects/detail/205>

Centres for Social Work (CSW), the Employment Agency<sup>41</sup> (PES) and offices in 37 municipalities together with the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers.

Project objectives comprise fostering institutionalised models of integrated and user centred provision of services for marginalised groups through the PES and CSW's and enhancing capacities and resources to develop and implement inclusive employment initiatives of local multi-stakeholder partnerships. Like Uzbekistan, Kosovo has a high level of informality. Kosovo's informal sector is among the highest in Europe with about 35% of employees in the informal sector (data 2017).<sup>42</sup>

The AIIP of the PES and the Department of Social Assistance Schemes is a module connecting the Employment Management Information System (EMIS) and the Social Assistance System (SAS). EMIS communicates with the SAS database and retrieves information on beneficiaries, including payment history. For all existing (and new) jobseekers, the SAS form is developed for transfer/registration from EMIS of jobseekers' education level, employment/unemployment statuses, ALMP measures history and job refusals (see Figure 3). With this module in place and communication with the SAS database, jobseekers no longer need to get a physical copy of the unemployment document from the PES and deliver it to CSW, as CSW officials retrieve the unemployment document from the EMIS (Scoppetta et al., 2024).

**Figure 3: AIIP in Kosovo**



Source: PowerPoint used by Kosovo PES (Mujku & Kalludra, 2022).

The participants of a peer review that was conducted on the AIIP found that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for developing/strengthening the integrated policy approaches applied in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership region and

<sup>41</sup> <https://apr.k.rks-gov.net/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/f2b0fce7-9309-5184-b56a-feab34cc000d/content>

that partnerships are key for an integrated policy approaches applied (Birtha et al., 2022). The practice is easily transferable and can be adapted to the needs of the country under scrutiny. Improved policy delivery models for vulnerable groups also comprise the Integrated Social Service Centers in Armenia (see below).

### 4.3 Integrated Social Service Centres (ISSCs) in Armenia

Armenia's integrated approach applied, including the ISSCs,<sup>43</sup> have been subject to consultancy services provided by the European Centre in 2022 to assist the country in improving the coordination of **social protection and employment service delivery** by order of the ILO.<sup>44</sup> The ISSCs consolidate the functions of five areas: social security, employment, disability, social care services and housing. To operationalise reforms, the authorities are implementing a complex set of measures including new procedures. Social workers and counsellors of the ISSCs were trained on ICM to apply the new tools. Please see relevant key information in table 4.

**Table 4: Key information on the practice in Armenia**

<b>Key features</b>	The 49 ISSCs consolidate the functions of five areas: social security, employment, disability, social care services and housing
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to unite all 4 bodies of the social protection sphere: the territorial centers of the social security service, the medical and social examination, and the state employment agency;</li> <li>• To increase the quality of social services and ensure the provision of a multi-faceted and complete package of social services in accordance with the social needs of the family.</li> </ul>
<b>Target group</b>	Vulnerable groups of society
<b>Year/Duration</b>	In 2010, the unified social service reform was introduced, and the Integrated Social Services Centres (ISSCs) created as part of the reform in 2012.
<b>Partners</b>	Inter-agency cooperation is regulated in Armenia by law. All relevant institutions at national and local level must work as one body to provide prevention and relief from poverty, including through increased employability and combatting labour exploitation
<b>Transferability elements</b>	Like in Uzbekistan, one-stop shops for the target group of vulnerable people are aimed at an integrated approach envisaged by including various policy areas such as housing and social care. Uzbekistan might also make use of the knowledge gained with SOP referral forms, SOP Case closure forms, Job description for Case Managers, Performance monitoring models, Certification, etc.

<sup>43</sup> <https://socservice.am/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.euro.centre.org/projects/detail/4261>



Inter-agency cooperation is regulated by law in Armenia. All relevant institutions at national and local level must work as one body to provide prevention and relief from poverty, including through increased employability and combatting labour exploitation. The principle of multidisciplinary should be applied for each client through case management. This principle is explained in more detail in the guide “Improving coordination of social protection and employment service delivery in Armenia and Tajikistan” and in the instructions “Managing Cases and Case Managers” that was developed to assist implementation of new processes for integrated policy approaches such as Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) referral forms, SOP Case closure forms, Job description for case managers, Performance monitoring models, Certification (Sandu & Scoppetta, 2022; Scoppetta & Sandu, 2022). These tools might be supportive for the implementation of ICM in Uzbekistan. The practice can also serve partners in Uzbekistan in their attempt to implementing one-stop shops for the target group of vulnerable people because of the holistic approach taken in including various policy areas such as housing and social care.

## 4.4 Job Carving and Job Crafting in Malta

The concept of Job Carving and Job Crafting implemented, for instance, in Malta<sup>45</sup> can serve as promising practice for Uzbekistan. **Job carving refers to the practice of rearranging work tasks within a company to create tailor-made employment opportunities.** As opposed to job carving, which is generally done by company managers (i.e. top-down process), **job crafting refers to a bottom-up process driven by employees who are given the autonomy to design and adjust their work and tasks.** The European Centre was contracted by the European Commission to explore the implementation of practices of this kind within the EU. Please see relevant key information in table 5 below.

**Table 5: Key information on the practice in Malta**

<b>Key features</b>	Job carving and job crafting can be effective strategies to overcome the challenges of the labour market (re)integration of persons facing barriers, and to keep workers employed by creating meaningful and productive employment.
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase of the labour market integration of jobseekers with disabilities;</li> <li>• Change the perspective of employers on the employment of people with disabilities;</li> </ul>

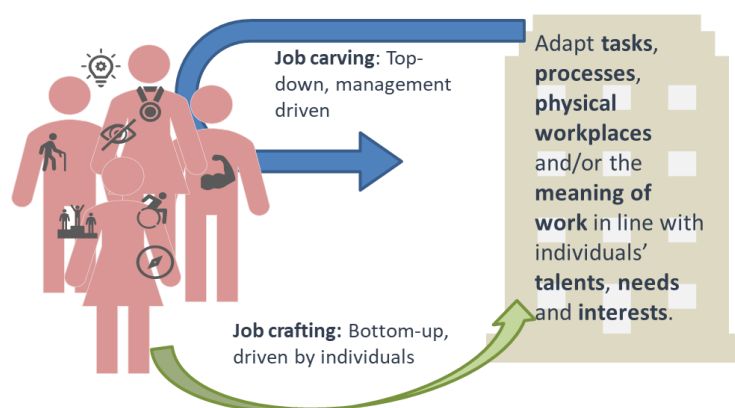
<sup>45</sup> Job Carving and Job Crafting is implemented in various EU countries (see Scoppetta et al., 2019).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enforcement of the 2% employment quota for persons with disabilities; and</li> <li>• closing the gap between the “requirements” of existing vacancies and the “preparedness” of the jobseekers with disabilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Target group</b>	Persons with disabilities
<b>Year/Duration</b>	2017 onwards
<b>Partners</b>	Jobsplus, the Maltese PES and Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF)
<b>Outcomes</b>	Creation of 278 jobs suitable to jobseekers (as of April 2018; Scoppetta, Davern & Geyer, 2019). In 2020, 236 people with disabilities were placed in employment. Across these roles more than 80% stay in their job and about 52% of workers supported by LSF are placed into carved jobs (OECD, 2021).
<b>Transferability elements</b>	It is a promising practice since it assists in building close relationship with firms and creating tailor-made employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Source: Scoppetta, Davern & Geyer (2019)

Job carving and job crafting can be effective strategies to overcome the challenges of the labour market (re)integration of persons facing barriers and to keep workers employed by creating meaningful and productive employment. It applies an innovative approach to adapt workplaces and/or to create new ones in line with persons’ individual talents, needs and motivations. **Rather than an ICM model, the practice is an example of a targeted employment program for persons with disabilities.** See figure 4 below on the difference between Job carving and crafting.

**Figure 4: Job carving and Job crafting**



Source: Scoppetta, Davern & Geyer (2019)

Jobsplus, the Maltese PES, entered a partnership with the Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF)<sup>46</sup>, which is an entity specialised in the labour market integration of job seekers

<sup>46</sup> <https://linospiterifoundation.org/about-us/best-practice/>

with disabilities. Project aims included the increase of the labour market integration of jobseekers with disabilities and the change of the perspective of employers to employ persons with disabilities. LSF set up a corporate relations unit to support enterprises in the recruitment of persons with disabilities. The corporate relations executive identifies existing occupations within the enterprise which are potentially suitable for jobseekers with disabilities. The “carving” exercise is driven by enterprise requirements and existing competencies and skills of the registered jobseekers with disabilities. This is coupled with pre-employment efforts such as training and work exposure schemes offered by Jobsplus to improve the employability and preparedness of the registered jobseekers with disabilities (Scoppetta et al., 2019). The enforcement of a minimum 2% employment quota for persons with disabilities in Maltese enterprises motivated many enterprises to actively seek persons with disabilities in their teams (Genova & Davern, 2022).

## 5 Policy recommendations

Based on our analysis and the selected practices (see above), we have identified four key intervention areas which aim to assist the government of Uzbekistan to address the challenges faced at different intervention levels more holistically and, finally, to adopt an integrated approach in employment and social policy delivery for persons with disabilities. The four identified intervention areas are:

- I. **Targeted employment programs for persons with disabilities**
- II. **Comprehensive and well-coordinated programs**
- III. **Partnership between actors of employment and social welfare**
- IV. **ICM for persons with disabilities**

Table 6 below relates the key findings of the analysis, the international practices and the four intervention areas that are presented in this section.

**Table 6** Matrix on key findings, related intervention areas and practices

Key findings of the analysis		Intervention areas	Practices
Persons with disabilities are four times less likely to be employed than persons without disabilities	Few ALMP 12 Social Assistance Programms	Targeted employment programs for	Practice: <b>Job Carving and Job Crafting</b>

There is no evidence whether the quota system has been effective to secure employment for persons with disabilities  Negative stereotypes and prejudices further affect opportunities for persons with disabilities in finding a job	Single Registry	persons with disabilities	
Missing integrated approach applied between employment and social protection		Comprehensive and well-coordinated programs	Practice: AIIP in Kosovo  Practice: Integrated Case Management in Armenia
PES, Monocentres and Inson Centres established at local/regional governance levels should jointly pilot ICM and thus practice enhanced cooperation/partnership		Partnership between actors of employment and social welfare  ICM for persons with disabilities	Practice: Case management in Lithuania

The intervention areas require actions at different levels of governance and by various agencies. For example, **to implement comprehensive and well-coordinated programs between employment and social protection, actors designing programs at central governance levels of both policy fields must cooperate.** Moreover, in parallel to adjustments made at central level, pilot/s implemented at local level gather practical insights that help to improve coordination and policy application (the pilot/s are foreseen in Tashkent)<sup>47</sup>.

## INTERVENTION AREA I

TARGETED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	
<b>Demands identified</b>	<b>Missing targeted employment measures for persons with disabilities</b>
<i>Entry points in Uzbekistan</i>	<i>www.ishplus.uz project</i>
Promising international practises	Job Carving and Job Crafting (e.g. in Malta)

The analysis of the literature review showed that targeted measures assisting persons

<sup>47</sup> During a mission in April 2024, which includes visits to partner organisations and discussions during a Participatory Scoping Workshop and a National Stakeholder Workshop, the possibilities, advantages and disadvantages for piloting of ICM at either Monocentres or at Inson Centres will be explored.

with disabilities in the integration into the labour market are frequently missing in Uzbekistan. The jobseeker/vacancy matching platform [www.ishplus.uz](http://www.ishplus.uz) might serve as an entry point for tailored services and offers for persons with disabilities that go beyond training for jobseekers with disabilities.

A need is thus seen **to design and set targeted offers for persons with disabilities** which build on their individual needs. In general, **measures empowering persons with disabilities are recommended** for implementation. Please note that all measures must comply with the UN CRPD.<sup>48</sup>

As for policy measures to be introduced, we suggest **designing comprehensive programs and making measures available in various formats including integration chains** (i.e., measures that follow each other in a sequence, partly provided by different actors). Examples for new measures with a view to the labour market entrance of persons with disabilities include **counselling services, workplace integration assistance, inclusion assistance, inclusion bonus for apprentices, start-up funding for the self-employed, youth coaching, and vocational training assistance programs for persons with disabilities**.<sup>49</sup>

The activities should be designed and implemented **by the PES under the leadership of the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction (MEPR)**. To meet the needs of the target group and best use synergies it is recommended to develop measures **in partnership with other actors** such as the NASP, the Inson Centres, NGOs such as Sharoit plus and the Monocentres (see Intervention Area III on partnership).

Next to **disability mainstreaming**, which is proposed, **specifically targeted measures for persons with disabilities** should be implemented. The implementation **of Job Carving and Job Crafting program** would assist in overcoming the challenge of missing job offers from firms (see above). The strength of this concept is that workplaces are “carved” or “crafted” together with firms by building on the needs of them and the talents of persons with disabilities. It however is an advanced concept which requires substantial investment.

## INTERVENTION AREA II

COMPREHENSIVE & WELL-COORDINATED PROGRAMS	
<b>Demands identified</b>	<b>Few programs and limited coordination between ALMP and social policies &amp; services</b>

<sup>48</sup> Laws and measures must comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the UN CRPD.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Scoppetta (2023).

Promising international practises	Regarding national policies and offers for unemployed persons with disability in Austria see, for instance, Scoppetta 2023 <sup>50</sup>
	About coordination mechanisms see AIIP Kosovo

For an effective ICM which results in positive changes in a client's situation (i.e., having basic income and inclusion into the labour market) two key preconditions in the service offered need to be met: **the availability of adequate monetary and non-monetary benefits and services for both employment and social assistance beneficiaries/clients** (Scoppetta & Sandu, 2022). Available ALMP measures however are limited in Uzbekistan and mainly refer to the public works program and training offers (see also above). Consequently, we suggest investment in targeted employment measures for persons with disabilities (see above).

Another major challenge identified by the ILO is the organisation of the service. At present, there are too many isolated units responsible for portions of the delivery of PES services (ILO, 2021). According to ILO (2021), the areas in most need of attention are individualised counselling and guidance services; the systemisation and analysis of available labour market information; the availability of an adequate system of active and passive labour market policies; and the review of funding mechanisms for labour market policies. Because supported employment measures including individual development plans as well as vocational rehabilitation, which for persons with disabilities has shown to be especially effective, are almost entirely not available in Uzbekistan, **we strongly recommend raising capacities of both labour market and social protection programs and developing offers such as the ones mentioned above<sup>51</sup>** that assist the groups in their pathway to integration into the labour market.

Finally, a need is seen to **apply coordination mechanisms between stakeholders (PES, NASP, Monocentres, INSON Social Service Centers, NGOs, research, etc.) to improve outreach, onboarding, service offers, registrations, referrals, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), monitoring and evaluation, etc.**

The **responsibility for integrating people with disabilities into the labour market is shared** by the various stakeholders (e.g., PES for employment programs under the lead of the MEPR, NASP, INSON Centres, Monocentres, etc.). Moreover, **each partner is responsible** for enhanced coordination mechanisms and plays its part in ensuring good coordination. Coordination can be achieved by various means such as regular meetings between the partners, case conferences<sup>52</sup> and the setting up a coordination

<sup>50</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23162&langId=en>

<sup>51</sup> They include amongst others counselling services, workplace integration assistance, inclusion assistance, inclusion bonus for apprentices, start-up funding for the self-employed, youth coaching, and vocational training assistance programs for persons with disabilities.

<sup>52</sup> Case Conferences are multidisciplinary meetings of professionals working with a client to share necessary information on the client (socio-economic status, history of benefits, services offered, etc.)

body<sup>53</sup> (see also Scoppetta & Sandu, 2022). Capacity building activities such as trainings of department staff might be needed to update skills of staff at partner organisations (nationally as well as regionally/locally). Moreover, specific dedicated training is recommended to enable for building up partnership at local levels, as described in the intervention area III.

### INTERVENTION AREA III

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ACTORS OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE	
<b>Demands identified</b>	<b>Few practiced cooperation between PES, NASP offices, Monocentres, INSON Social Service Centers, etc.</b>
<i>Entry points in Uzbekistan</i>	<i>Government of Uzbekistan (2023a)</i> <i>MoU signed by the Monocenter “Ishga Markhamat” and “Sharoit plus”<sup>54</sup></i>
Promising international practises	European Code of Conduct on Partnership Integrated Social Service Centres in Armenia

We recommend strengthening the systemic link between employment and social protection by **formalising cooperation between stakeholders responsible at all levels of governance via standard procedures, rules and protocols**. Measures and services available from these stakeholders should jointly be offered to clients. International experience confirms the usefulness of formalising agreements between partners. **Partnership agreements** should be developed and made available informing about agreements on targets, jointly or individually used tools, roles and functions of each agency, resources as well as interests and other contributions.

Partnership formation is characterized by joint objective setting, shared commitment and cooperative decision making. Alliances can help to improve workflow processes between the partners. **Bilateral cooperation of employment and social protection agencies should thus also be expanded to other actors such as NGOs offering**

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and discuss risk factors; the needs of the client; required supervision and support interventions; and the roles of the professionals involved. The aim of Case Conferences is to review service options across sectors and agencies and to make formal decisions with the best interest of the client (adapted from [https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/143.11\\_EN\\_SOP%20Case%20Conferencing\\_26Oct2021.pdf](https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/143.11_EN_SOP%20Case%20Conferencing_26Oct2021.pdf))

<sup>53</sup> Coordination Bodies encompass all actors involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions. This includes interventions jointly agreed to be implemented such as individual action plans, referral processes, etc. The body clearly defines actions to be taken within the ICM system.

<sup>54</sup> <https://sharoitplus.uz/en/sharoit-plus-signed-a-memorandum-of-understanding-with-the-monocenter-ishga-markhamat/>

services<sup>55</sup>, municipalities assisting in embedding measures to local contexts, enterprises offering jobs and research institutes assisting in measuring effectiveness of the policies jointly implemented by partners.

Uzbekistan can already build on established cooperation as laid down, for instance, in the Decision *On additional measures to ensure the rights of the population to receive social protection and to provide state social assistance and services*, (Government 2023a), which refers to cooperation of the "Inson" Social Services Center with local executive authorities, regional state bodies and organizations, and citizens' self-government bodies. The MoU signed by the Monocenter "Ishga Markhamat" and Sharoit plus might serve as another entry point for partnership formation. What is noticeable here is that an NGO, the Public Association of Disabled People, is the key partner for delivering services. NGOs have specialised know-how on the target group and can easier access them. **Recommendations for working arrangements among stakeholders, including PES, Inson centres, Monocenters, NGOs, employers and employees will be part of the analytical paper** (as of May 2024; see also below).

## INTERVENTION AREA IV

ICM FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	
Demands identified	Lack of ICM for persons with disabilities
<i>Entry points in Uzbekistan</i>	<i>Decree of the President in relation to the tasks of social workers employed in INSON Social Service Centers (Government of Uzbekistan, 2023b)</i> <i>WB project 'Strengthening the Social Protection System Project' (2019-2024) at PES</i> <i>Joint Work Programme with UNDP, ILO &amp; UNICEF (2020-2022), for social services</i> <i>Case management in the Surkhandarya region</i>
Promising international practises	ICM applied in Lithuania Kosovo's AIIP

Suggestions for an Uzbekistan ICM model to be tested will be part of the analytical paper, which will be drafted following the mission in May 2024. As first step, the need for enhanced cooperation between potential partners and the requirement to set up

<sup>55</sup> The European Parliament underlines the importance civil society is playing in supporting reforms and good government (European Parliament, 2023).



an ICM model for persons with disabilities (piloted at a Monocenter and/or INSON Centre) will be discussed with all stakeholders. A Participatory Scoping Workshop<sup>56</sup> will be conducted on 18 April 2024 in Tashkent, which is followed by a national stakeholder workshop<sup>57</sup> on 19 April 2024.

A consequent next step will be the training and hiring of case managers, which are a core function for an effective ICM since they make use of all locally available measures and services. Their goal is to assist the client progressively in the social inclusion and labour market integration processes. **Suggestions for the design of the model and necessary qualification and roles of case manager will be detailed in the upcoming analytical paper.**<sup>58</sup>

## 6 Conclusions

Despite efforts taken by the government, the situation of persons with disabilities in Uzbekistan needs improving. Only 43% of persons with disabilities perceive themselves to be fully enjoying their rights as provided by the Constitution and laws of Uzbekistan (in comparison, 74% of persons without disabilities inform they enjoy their rights). Persons with disabilities (and their carers) have a lower welfare level than others due to lower pay levels, exclusion from the formal job market, insufficient disability allowances and disability-related expenses (UN Uzbekistan, 2019).

Consequently, the right of persons with disabilities to work and be protected from social risks such as unemployment is an important area for reforms. The government is engaged in implementing reforms and strategies with other partners to help overcoming Uzbekistan's complex development challenges by integrated cross-sectoral solutions.<sup>59</sup> Today, employment and social protection are still fragmented

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<sup>56</sup> Envisaged attendees of the *Participatory Scoping Workshop* include PES counsellors, social workers, INSON Social Service Centre staff, VET trainers from Monocentres, service providers (NGOs such as Sharoit plus), beneficiaries (persons with disabilities and/or organisations representing their interest), employers, social partners, research institutes, and evaluators. Further partners can be identified in WB Group (2022, p. 20ff.). The aim of the workshop is to set the scene together with the partners for the development of the service delivery model in Tashkent, receive a common understanding on the need for partnership, agree on joint targets and first steps for an ICM model in Uzbekistan.

<sup>57</sup> Envisaged attendees of the *National Stakeholder Workshop* include civil servants from the MEPR, NASP, UNDP (and others such as WB), other public authorities, umbrella organisations/NGOs representing persons with disabilities and social partners at central governance level. The aim of the workshop is to jointly discuss and assess the findings of the Scoping Workshop, agree on major cornerstones for the ICM model and on further steps to be taken by actors involved in ICM.

<sup>58</sup> Please see ICM Standards and Guide, for instance, here:

<https://www.cmsuk.org/files/CMSUK%20General/000Standards%202nd%20Ed%20Nov%202009.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> United Nations (2021): Executive Board of the UNDP, the UNFPA and the UN Office for Project Services. 1st Session of 2021, New York.

across various institutions with no one being responsible for the coordination or integration of interventions and establishing horizontal links across programs and schemes.<sup>60</sup> This results in the lack of integrated approaches to the provision of benefits and services.

Based on the conducted analysis of the literature review four European practices have been identified and are presented in this report. Moreover, four intervention areas have been singled out which aim to assist the government and its partners in adopting an integrated approach in employment and welfare services delivery for persons with disabilities. The four intervention areas are: 1) *Targeted employment programs for persons with disabilities*; 2) *Comprehensive and well-coordinated programs*; 3) *Partnership between actors*; and 4) *ICM for persons with disabilities*.

Integrated approaches are to be applied at various levels of governance and include strengthening cooperation between policy fields and partners. Because targeted measures in entering the labour market are frequently missing for persons with disabilities in Uzbekistan, a need is seen to **design offers that meet the needs of both persons with disabilities and firms. Measures that empower persons with disabilities such as counselling offers, comprehensive integrated programs that enable for disability mainstreaming and targeted employment measures such as workplace integration assistance are recommended for implementation to support persons with disabilities in their integration path. These measures should be made available in various formats including integration chains.** Suggestions for an ICM model to be tested in Uzbekistan will be part of the analytical paper that will be drafted following the mission in May 2024.

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## Figures

- Figure 1: Overview of social protection in Uzbekistan
- Figure 2: Lithuania's Case management model
- Figure 3: AIIP in Kosovo
- Figure 4: Job carving and Job crafting

## Tables

- Table 1: Key data Uzbekistan
- Table 2: Key information on the practice in Lithuania
- Table 3: Key information on the practice in Kosovo
- Table 4: Key information on the practice in Armenia
- Table 5: Key information on the practice in Malta
- Table 6: Matrix on key findings, related intervention areas and practices