

## **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN: LEGAL FRAMEWORK, INSTITUTIONAL PROGRESS AND INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON**

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### **Abstract:**

In recent years, inclusive education has gained significant momentum in Uzbekistan, particularly within the framework of higher education. This paper examines the legislative foundations and practical implementation of inclusive policies, following the country's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on June 7, 2021. The adoption of the National Action Plan for 2023–2025 by the chambers of the Oliy Majlis, as well as Presidential Decree No. 4860, has laid the groundwork for systemic changes. During the first half of the 2023–2024 academic year, inclusive education was introduced in 530 general education institutions across the republic. The “Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026” prioritizes inclusive education and employment of people with disabilities, emphasizing their active participation in the socioeconomic life of the country.

This study juxtaposes Uzbekistan's evolving inclusive education system with international trends, highlighting challenges such as academic and physical barriers, lack of readiness among university staff, and stereotypical societal attitudes. The paper further examines the psychosocial wellbeing of students in inclusive environments and proposes targeted measures for improving inclusive practices in higher education institutions. It argues for the need to establish a barrier-free psychological and pedagogical environment and encourages the development of a genuine inclusive culture in universities.

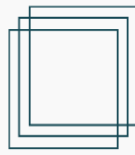
**Keywords:** Inclusive education, higher education policy, students with disabilities, psychosocial wellbeing, accessibility, Uzbekistan, inclusive pedagogy, social inclusion, educational reform, global trends.

### **Introduction**

Inclusive processes have been significantly intensified within Uzbekistan's educational system in recent years, particularly in the sphere of higher education. This progress has been underpinned by a number of normative legal measures. Notably, Uzbekistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on June 7, 2021. In line with this commitment, the chambers of the Oliy Majlis adopted a National Action Plan for the implementation of the Convention's provisions for 2023–2025. Presidential Decree No. 4860 has begun to yield measurable outcomes in the lives of citizens, including the integration of inclusive education in 530 general educational institutions by the 2023–2024 academic year.

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The “Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022–2026” has identified inclusive education and employment as strategic priorities, with specific goals such as the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the country's sociocultural and economic life (Goal 66) and the promotion of quality and accessible education at all stages, especially in regional settings (Goal 70). Systematic measures have been introduced to support young people with disabilities, increase their social engagement, and foster their involvement in science, technology, the arts, and sports.

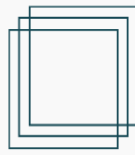
According to the Presidential Decree No.57 (December 21, 2021), the Youth Affairs Agency is tasked with assisting young people with disabilities in accessing subsidies for self-employment, entrepreneurship, vocational education, foreign language training, and education at non-governmental institutions. In this regard, Resolution No. 341 of the Cabinet of Ministers (June 21, 2022) mandates annual subsidies equivalent to 50 times the baseline calculation amount for up to 500 young individuals with disabilities, financed by the State Youth Policy Support Fund.

In 2023, the number of youth aged 14–30 with disabilities reached 121,009 (68,723 males and 52,268 females), including 11,569 individuals with Group I disability status, 69,724 with Group II, 3,655 with Group III, and 36,043 classified as children with disabilities. Efforts to subsidize their education, transportation, and accommodation are facilitated through Uzbekistan's Unified Portal of Interactive Government Services.

The Republican Center for Career Guidance and Psychological-Pedagogical Diagnostics has developed 12 methodological and 10 instructional manuals since the 2021–2022 academic year to aid inclusive education practitioners. Moreover, the establishment of the Laboratory for Inclusive Education within the Center has yielded tangible outcomes. Annual national and international conferences have been organized to address inclusive education topics such as “Current Issues of Inclusive Education: Problems and Solutions” and “International Experience and Practices in Inclusive Education.”

Aligned with the Decree of the President No.5712 (April 29, 2019), the Concept for the Development of the Public Education System in Uzbekistan until 2030 was adopted. Within this framework, the 2020–2025 Concept for Inclusive Education and a corresponding Roadmap were introduced to enhance education for children with special educational needs and improve the quality of inclusive services.

Similar processes are evident worldwide. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the number of students with disabilities tripled between the 1994/1995 and 2002/2003 academic years, reaching 110,770 [1]. The increasing number of students enrolled in inclusive higher education institutions naturally foregrounds questions of quality—specifically, not only students' academic success but also their psychosocial wellbeing. True inclusion implies more than mere co-education of students with and without disabilities. It entails creating an integrative social and psychological environment that addresses unique emotional and interpersonal challenges. However, psychosocial



wellbeing remains an underexplored domain in inclusive education studies, with most existing literature offering anecdotal or localized insights [2–3].

To fill this research gap, this study contributes a nuanced understanding of the interplay between general and specific factors influencing the psychosocial wellbeing of students with disabilities from various nosological groups, in comparison to their non-disabled peers. The findings offer theoretical and practical implications for enhancing inclusive learning environments.

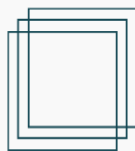
Scholars have emphasized the need for a barrier-free educational space, focusing on both infrastructural accessibility and cultural transformation [4]. Physical barriers often stem from underdeveloped campus infrastructure [5]; academic barriers reflect a lack of preparedness among faculty and staff [6]; and evaluative barriers arise from prevailing social stereotypes about the capabilities of persons with disabilities [7–8]. These stereotypes exert psychological pressure on students and hinder their academic and social development [9].

Addressing these challenges requires fostering a robust culture of inclusion, where inclusivity becomes a hallmark of institutional quality [10]. Waterfield and West [1] describe three models of inclusive education—two compensatory and one genuinely inclusive. The compensatory models include adjustments in curricula and additional support services without fundamentally altering the system. The third, inclusive model incorporates diverse assessment methods and organizational practices that foster meaningful academic and social interaction among students of varied backgrounds and experiences [11].

The influence of inclusive environments on students' psychosocial wellbeing extends to both immediate emotional states and long-term personal development. While the definition of psychosocial wellbeing remains contested, it generally encompasses personal fulfillment, resilience, self-actualization, and autonomy [12]. Social interactions within the university context significantly shape students' attitudes toward inclusion and identity formation.

Given these findings, the paper recommends the implementation of regular professional development programs for psychologists and educational methodologists, supported by certification from a national training center. Additionally, senior-year pedagogical students should have access to internships in inclusive schools.

To cultivate an inclusive societal culture, efforts must be made to raise public awareness through media, community outreach, and educational events. Ultimately, achieving educational equity and success for all students—regardless of their abilities or background—must be at the core of inclusive education reform.



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