

**EXAMINING THE NEXUS BETWEEN SOCIAL PROTECTION AND
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES IN ARMENIA**

By

Susanna Kardashyan

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Public Policy

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Policy

Supervisor: Martin Kahanec

Vienna, Austria

2023

Author's Declaration Form

I, the undersigned, Susanna Kardashyan, candidate for MA Public Policy, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research.

All sources have been properly credited in the text, notes, and the bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. Furthermore, I declare that no part of this thesis has been generated using artificial intelligence (ChatGPT).

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form as coursework for credits or to another institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Date: 02.06.2023

Name: Susanna Kardashyan

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'Susanna Kardashyan'.

Abstract

This research investigates the contribution of social protection policy to the successful implementation of inclusive education in Armenia. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, including a review of the literature, policy analysis, and qualitative data collection.

The findings emphasize the importance of social protection programs in promoting inclusive education practices. These policies offer necessary services, accommodations, and support to children with disabilities, providing equal opportunity and participation. The study highlights the need of intersectoral collaboration in aligning policies and maximizing the impact of inclusive education in Armenia.

The findings have implications for key stakeholders, including policy makers and grassroots level implementers. Recognizing the critical role of social protection, stakeholders may collaborate to create an inclusive society that supports the realization of all children's fundamental right to education. The findings highlight the significance of a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to promoting inclusive education, which contributes to the holistic development and social inclusion of children with special needs.

Finally, this study offers valuable insights into the contribution of social protection policy to inclusive education implementation in Armenia. By understanding the connection between social protection and inclusive education, policymakers can enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives and foster a more inclusive society.

Table of contents

Abstract	ii
Table of contents	iii
Introduction	1
Literature review	4
Research design	15
Discussion: Contribution of Social Protection Policy to Inclusive Education Implementation in Armenia.....	22
Conclusion	38
Reference List	42

Introduction

Social protection policy plays an important role in protecting the well-being of vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities and children with special needs in general, by providing them with a safety net and guaranteeing them access to quality education. It follows that quality inclusive education is a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty, including non-monetary poverty, and overcoming social exclusion, offering equal opportunities for all students to learn and be included in society. But it is clear that social inclusion is more than just having access to basic education in primary school. In order to establish real social inclusion, it is crucial for social and child protection policies to be consistent with the principles of quality inclusive education. This situation calls for a close and collaborative approach among all key stakeholders responsible for developing and implementing social protection and inclusive education policies at national, regional and local levels.

In general, this research focuses on identifying gaps and overlaps in the intersectoral cooperation between inclusive education and social protection, as well as the overlaps and deficiencies of services provided within these two sectors, specifically rehabilitation services. The term "gaps" refers to the insufficiency or inadequacy of required services and resources, while "overlaps" highlight issues related to duplication and inefficient allocation of resources. In the context of this study, several research objectives have been identified. Firstly, the research aims to explore the landscape of inclusive education policies in Armenia. Additionally, it seeks to conduct a comparative analysis of social protection and inclusive education policies, specifically focusing on their impact on child inclusion. Moreover, the research aims to identify and map key stakeholders and actors involved in the realms of child protection and inclusive education. This mapping exercise aims to uncover potential areas for collaboration and synergy among different sectors. Simultaneously, it aims to identify the

barriers that hinder cross-sector collaboration at both the policy-making and implementation levels. Lastly, the research endeavors to shed light on the role of social protection policies in enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation in Armenia, with a particular emphasis on service provision and accessibility.

Assessing the contribution of social protection policy towards the quality of inclusive education, this research generates arguments about the mutual relationship between the two ministries, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports mainly in two key areas:

- the investigation of the provision of services for children with disabilities and special needs, who face challenging circumstances in their lives. Specifically, it focuses on analyzing the gaps and overlaps in rehabilitation services within the domains of social protection and inclusive education. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of services and identify areas that require improvement or coordination between the two fields.
- cooperation between the two fields both at the institutional level and in de facto operation.

In addition, the lack of clear separation between services and the absence or deficiencies of institutional mechanisms for interdepartmental communication and information flows in practice between departmental policy makers and social policy implementers at the community level contribute to the deepening of the problem. Furthermore, these gaps can raise ethical issues in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. We should take all this as a wake-up call to effectively address and address the above-mentioned issues.

In conclusion, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the intricate interplay between social protection and inclusive education policies. By delving into these issues, it aims to highlight the significance of collaborative efforts across sectors in shaping effective practices for quality inclusive education. The findings of this study hold the potential to inform policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders about the critical need for coherence between social protection and inclusive education policies. By aligning these policies with the overarching goal of providing high-quality inclusive education for children with disabilities and special needs in Armenia, we can enhance overall well-being and foster holistic development for all.

Literature Review

The primary objective of this literature review is to investigate the interplay between social protection and inclusive education and examine how social protection can play a role in facilitating the effective implementation of inclusive education of high quality. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a thorough comprehension of the essential points of intersection and interconnected pathways between social protection and inclusive education. To commence this exploration, it is crucial to establish a clear definition of the term "social protection" within the specific context of this study.

Social protection can be broadly understood as a collection of strategies and measures aimed at strengthening the abilities of individuals, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged or vulnerable, to break free from poverty (or prevent its occurrence) and effectively handle various risks and unexpected events (Cecchini and Martínez, 2012). During times of crisis or sudden disruptions, social protection initiatives primarily serve as a way to address urgent necessities, diminish mortality rates, and alleviate human distress¹. It encompasses a range of methods, including benefits in cash or in-kind, social insurance, and social services.

Broadly speaking, social protection entails government-mandated policies and initiatives aimed at addressing risks and vulnerabilities faced by poor and nearly poor households. There is a growing acknowledgment of its capacity to extend beyond a safety-net approach that solely focuses on fulfilling individuals' fundamental requirements (Cecchini, 2014). Instead, it has the potential to contribute to more ambitious goals related to development and transformation. This perspective emphasizes that social protection should not only assist individuals in meeting their

¹ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. Social Protection. Available at: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/social-protection_en

basic needs but also promote their long-term welfare while advancing broader societal objectives such as equity, social justice, and empowerment (Babajanian, 2013).

Therefore, the understanding and application of social protection in development discussions and practical implementation have undergone a transformative process.

Initially, during the 1980s, social protection was primarily perceived as a "safety net," a temporary measure designed to offer basic support to individuals facing extreme poverty (Mkandawire 2001). However, the World Bank's introduction of the Social Risk Management Framework in the late 1990s played a crucial role in expanding the scope and acceptance of social protection. It positioned social protection as a mainstream policy tool for economically safeguarding the poor and vulnerable (Holzmann and Jorgensen 2009). Moreover, it introduced the notion of vulnerability as a dynamic and adaptable perspective for examining the underlying causes and distinctive features of people's deprivation (Babajanian 2013).

Nevertheless, since mid-2000s, social protection extends its scope beyond material advantages. It also encompasses non-material assistance such as counseling and other social work services. Additionally, social protection encompasses the provision of education, healthcare, and other indispensable services that foster human development and overall well-being. Thus, the discourse on social protection has progressed beyond poverty alleviation and sustaining livelihoods to embrace broader developmental objectives. Consequently, social protection is now regarded as a policy instrument capable of promoting extensive enhancements in human well-being. This signifies that reducing monetary poverty is not the sole aim of social protection and that it does not guarantee the complete well-being of society or the fulfillment of fundamental human rights. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), "social protection, or social security, is a human right" and is defined as a set of policies and

programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle². Thus, it also includes non-material assistance such as counseling and other social work services. Additionally, social protection encompasses the provision of education, healthcare, and other indispensable services that foster human development and overall well-being. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that social protection goes beyond addressing monetary poverty and encompasses the broader goal of upholding and ensuring fundamental human rights (Babajanian 2013).

In contrast, monetary poverty is commonly assessed based on financial income and assets, which results in a narrow, one-dimensional perspective. In this framework, income is considered not only as an indicator of well-being or consumption capabilities but also as a factor influencing activities, conditions, and personal experiences (Anand, Jones, Doroghue and Tetler 2020). However, relying on a single indicator fails to capture the multifaceted nature of poverty. Therefore, multidimensional poverty encompasses a range of deprivations faced by impoverished individuals and families in their daily lives, including issues such as poor health, limited access to education, inadequate living conditions, lack of empowerment, low-quality employment, exposure to violence, and residing in environmentally hazardous areas, among other factors³.

Gaining the comprehensive understanding of the concept of social protection establishes the groundwork for investigating its connection with inclusive education. Through an examination of poverty, social exclusion, and their interdependence, this review aims to ascertain the ways

² World Social Protection Report 2017-19. Universal Social Protection to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Geneva. International Labour Organization. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_604882.pdf

³ Policy – A Multidimensional Approach. What is Multidimensional Poverty? Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. Available at: <https://ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/>

in which social protection can contribute to the successful implementation of high-quality inclusive education in a broader context.

The concept of multidimensional poverty and its resolution is closely intertwined with one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework's six Guiding Principles, namely the principle of "Leaving no one behind." This principle emphasizes the need to address discrimination and inequalities, which often intersect and affect people's participation and activities as rights holders. The barriers individuals encounter in accessing services, resources, and equal opportunities are not merely coincidental or due to resource scarcity; rather, they are the result of discriminatory laws, policies, and social practices that systematically marginalize certain groups⁴. Hence, the connection between multidimensional poverty and inclusive education is highly significant among other fields that ensure the realization of fundamental human rights.

Specifically, multidimensional poverty frequently leads to restricted access to education for individuals and communities, resulting in various educational barriers such as financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, long distances to schools, and social discrimination. Poverty can negatively impact the quality of education received by individuals, as families in poverty or extreme poverty may have limited opportunities to afford educational resources like textbooks, materials, and technology, leading to an inferior learning experience. Furthermore, multidimensional poverty often reflects broader social inequalities, including discrimination based on factors such as gender, disability, ethnicity, and socio-economic status which can also lead to social exclusion.

⁴ United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2019). United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-guidance>

When examining poverty and social exclusion, inclusive education takes on a distinctive perspective by focusing on the causes and consequences of disadvantage. In this context, inclusive education goes beyond merely improving students' educational performance; its objective is to break the cycle of poverty and social disadvantage that hinders individuals, communities, and societies (Armstrong and Spandagou 2009). In this sense, this objective of inclusive education greatly intersects with the main purpose of social protection policy.

Both multidimensional poverty reduction and inclusive education are closely intertwined with the overarching aim of sustainable development. Inclusive education plays a crucial role in realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 4 (Quality Education)⁵. By addressing poverty through inclusive education, societies can work towards reducing inequalities, fostering social inclusion, and establishing a more equitable and sustainable future.

On the other hand, through its focus on the multifaceted nature of poverty, social protection programs can effectively tackle the diverse needs and difficulties encountered by individuals and communities. By addressing the various dimensions of poverty, social protection initiatives can assist individuals in overcoming a range of deprivations, including the violation of the right to education. Consequently, this approach enhances resilience and safeguards the individuals against being pushed further into poverty as a result of unexpected circumstances or events, thereby promoting inclusive development as a tangible outcome.

In the context of fostering quality inclusive education, social protection serves a dual purpose, functioning not only as a safety net but also as a potent catalyst for social assistance, social dialogue, and social inclusion. Its overarching goal is to cultivate a society where every

⁵ UN Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs in Action. Available at: https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals?gclid=CjwKCAjwscGjBhAXEiwAswQqNEPFXDO7py-TWY0aSHJ4NKYIaGSy8lr-hk71XmONVb6nYM8aq1RRkhoChVYQAvD_BwE

individual and group is genuinely valued, enjoying equal access to opportunities and actively participating in the social, economic, and political fabric of their communities. By dismantling barriers that impede individuals from realizing their true potential and experiencing a profound sense of belonging and interconnectedness, social protection plays a pivotal role in mitigating the widespread occurrence of social exclusion. Social exclusion, characterized by the marginalization and deprivation of certain individuals or groups from the essential resources and opportunities necessary for complete societal engagement, can arise from a myriad of factors, such as poverty, discrimination, limited educational or healthcare access, disabilities, or geographical isolation (Kidd, 2017).

The notion of social exclusion finds resonance within the realms of social policy and literature on social development as a means of conceptualizing the state of human deprivation and the intricate mechanisms through which it arises and perpetuates. Social exclusion is a dynamic and ever-evolving process that hinders individuals from fully participating in the activities that society normatively prescribes. Moreover, it builds barriers that impede access to essential information, resources, social connections, acknowledgment, and a sense of identity, leading to a gradual erosion of self-esteem and a diminishing capacity to pursue personal aspirations (Silver 2007).

According to de Haan's classification (1999), social exclusion can serve as a framework to comprehend both the consequences and processes of deprivation. When examining the outcomes of deprivation, the concept of social exclusion elucidates the range and magnitude of individuals' deprived circumstances. It sheds light on the multifaceted nature of human deprivation, encompassing various dimensions beyond just income. Thus, social exclusion signifies that individuals may face exclusion from employment, access to productive resources, economic opportunities, as well as limited availability of vital services, adequate housing,

education, healthcare, participation in social and cultural activities, personal security, political rights, and opportunities for voice and representation. Typically, individuals experience deprivation across multiple dimensions, and in some cases, across numerous dimensions simultaneously (Ruggeri Laderchi et al. 2003).

In this paper, we will specifically focus on one aspect of social exclusion: exclusion from social services. This form of exclusion can arise due to various factors, including inadequate public policies and ineffective institutional frameworks, deficiencies in legal regulations and norms, poor governance, including insufficient collaboration and information flow between key stakeholders and decision-making authorities, vulnerabilities that persist throughout an individual's life, limited human capabilities, as well as informal norms and practices.

Although the concept of social exclusion originated in Europe, there is a dearth of research that applies the framework of social exclusion/inclusion to social protection initiatives outside of Europe. In developing countries, social exclusion is typically used descriptively to describe the unfair treatment of specific individuals or social groups. Consequently, social exclusion is often used literally to describe the marginalization of individuals and groups based on particular social characteristics, such as gender or disability. For instance, Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2008) view social exclusion as a form of vulnerability, alongside discrimination and the violation of minority rights. Often, when evaluating the inclusiveness of social protection programs, the focus is placed on the concept of social exclusion/inclusion, rather than examining how these programs actually affect the individuals and families who receive them. A significant portion of social protection literature primarily focuses on assessing the level of exclusion experienced by impoverished households and those who qualify for social protection programs (as it was evidenced by the research conducted by de la Brière and Rawlings in 2006).

Not only is the importance of addressing inequality and building more inclusive societies emphasized in theoretical literature and empirical studies, but it is also recognized by international organizations such as UNICEF among others. On account of this, the 2015 European Report on Development acknowledges that social protection can be a significant mechanism for reversing exclusion and enabling greater empowerment and inclusion of marginalized groups (European University Institute, 2010)⁶. UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework (UNICEF, 2019)⁷ asserts that social protection should actively facilitate measures that target social exclusion, enabling individuals to access essential services and attain a sufficient standard of living. It is crucial to highlight the contrasting perspectives on poverty, stemming from both economic and social inclusion approaches, as this bears significant importance in this context. The economic approach to poverty examines it from the perspectives of material well-being and internal quality of life. In contrast, the social inclusion approach emphasizes the relational quality of life, focusing on individuals' interactions with broader social institutions and frameworks. While the economic approach centers on personal welfare, the social inclusion approach recognizes the significance of social relationships and resources in achieving overall human well-being. Consequently, the social inclusion approach highlights that individuals can experience poverty even with sufficient income or means for survival if they lack supportive social structures that provide adequate protection during times of need (Wagle 2009).

One of the ways to combat social exclusion and ensure social inclusion is through the implementation of inclusive education policies, which are closely aligned with the objectives of social protection and child protection policies. Inclusive education, with its philosophy of

⁶ The 2010 European Report on Development, Social Protection for Inclusive Development, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, San Domenico di Fiesole.

⁷ UNICEF (2019) UNICEF's Global Social Protection Programme Framework. UNICEF, New York. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/61011/file/Global-social-protection-programme-framework-2019.pdf>

addressing social exclusion and fostering social inclusion, encompasses various interconnected concepts that have garnered global recognition and have been institutionalized within the framework of human rights.

Inclusive education lies in ensuring the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept all children. The right to access and inclusion in education is expressly acknowledged and protected by international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)⁸ ratified by nearly every country around the globe. The CRC is further supported by the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)⁹, UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (1994)¹⁰, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)¹¹, all of which advocate for the importance of promoting inclusivity in education at every level.

Nicholas Burnett underscores the utmost importance of inclusive education in his Foreword to Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (2009). He highlights that inclusive education extends beyond particular groups and encompasses all students, fostering diversity and inclusivity.

Burnett stresses the notion that inclusive education surpasses being a mere strategy or process. Instead, it involves a comprehensive transformation of schools, enabling them to successfully meet the distinct requirements of each child, irrespective of their background or individual characteristics. The primary objective is to eradicate exclusion arising from negative attitudes

⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text#>

⁹ Convention against Discrimination in Education. Adopted by General Conference at its 11th Session, Paris, 14 December 1960. Available at: <https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/UNESCO%20Convention%20against%20Discrimination%20in%20Education.pdf>

¹⁰ The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June, 1994. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>

¹¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2006. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

and insufficient recognition of diversity across multiple dimensions, including economic status, social class, language, gender, abilities among other measures (Burnett 2009).

Thus, the practice of inclusive education around the world is increasingly becoming an opportunity that promotes social equality and the realization of potential among all learners. By ensuring that all children have the opportunity to participate and learn at school, inclusive education seeks to reduce social exclusion as a bottom line. Overall, inclusive education is an important approach to overcoming social exclusion and promoting social inclusion. However, as it became clear as a result of the above, inclusive education, as a set of services and a separate strategy, is closely related to social protection and its tools. This means that ideally these two policies, serving a similar goal and end result, should mostly coordinate their strategic approaches and implementation steps. This will ensure a more targeted allocation of resources (Peters and Besley 2014).

It is worth noting that research conducted in Uzbekistan, a post-Soviet country, reveals an interesting perspective. The author highlights that all children aspire to be included and educated in mainstream schools, living within their communities alongside their families. However, the author observes that the realization of the educational rights of children with disabilities is not solely based on free choice. This realization leads to the concept that inclusive education can be seen as a form of social protection for these children. They receive education in special schools, which, in fact, encompasses various aspects of their care and social protection (Ismailov, 2021).

In contrast, the approach of universal inclusion has already been implemented in many regions of Armenia. This approach asserts that every child, regardless of their special needs or disability status, has the inherent right to education in a mainstream school, with access to necessary services and the opportunities of reasonable accommodation. The definition of inclusive

education in the Law on Mainstream Education of the Republic of Armenia further reinforces this notion. It states that inclusive education is designed for every child, including those who require specialized educational conditions, ensuring an adapted environment that maximizes their participation in the educational process and the attainment of educational standards¹².

Therefore, the guarantee of providing a child's education in a mainstream school lies in the relationship between social protection and inclusive education. Social protection serves as a supporting policy for the effective implementation of quality inclusive education.

Overall, the close interconnectedness of these two policies is based on two main dimensions: rights-based approach and social inclusion approach. The rights-based approach highlights the entitlement to social protection as a fundamental human right. It is concerned with ensuring that all individuals and groups have access to basic social protections, regardless of income, status, or location. Beneficiaries' participation in decision-making processes is prioritized under a rights-based approach to social protection, and they are empowered to claim their rights. The inclusive approach recognizes that social protection policies and programs must address the needs of all persons and groups, including those who are marginalized, excluded, or discriminated against. It seeks to increase social inclusion and eliminate inequities by giving targeted assistance to the most disadvantaged groups, including children with special needs.

¹² Հանրակրթության մասին ՀՀ օրենք (English translation: The Law on Mainstream Education of RA). Available at: <https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=155046>

Research Design

Research question: How social protection policy contributes to the purpose of inclusive education implementation in Armenia?

Background information on main concepts and operationalization

Social protection policies can provide a safety net for vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, and ensure they have access to quality education. Quality inclusive education, on the other hand, can help break the cycle of poverty and exclusion by providing equal opportunities for all students to learn and succeed. It is not a secret that social inclusion itself cannot be fulfilled only through the accessibility to basic education at mainstream school. So social and child protection policies should go in line with the purpose of quality inclusive education. Thus, the main guarantee of quality inclusive education should be a smooth and intersectoral collaboration between the key stakeholders who design and implement the policies of social protection and inclusive education on national, regional and local levels.

Thus, this research aims to understand and interpret the patterns of intersectoral collaboration and the links between social protection policy and inclusive education policy and their implementation in Armenia. For that reason, the research question seeks to explore the meanings and interpretations that individuals and groups in Armenia attach to the relationship between social protection policy and quality inclusive education implementation. In terms of interconnection between social protection policy and quality inclusive education implementation in Armenia, this research will help identify the barriers and challenges in intersectoral collaboration that prevent marginalized and vulnerable population from accessing quality education. Accordingly, this will include examining the role of social protection

policies, such as cash transfers or social assistance programs, in reducing poverty and improving access to education for disadvantaged groups.

The specific objectives are:

- To explore inclusive education policies in Armenia;
- To analyze relevant social policies focusing on child protection;
- To compare and juxtapose social and educational policies from child inclusivity perspective;
- To map the key stakeholders and players in the field of child protection and inclusive education and identify the synergies of intersectoral collaboration as well as the barriers to their cooperation on policy-shaping and policy implementation levels.
- To reveal how social protection policy contributes to the effectiveness of inclusive education implementation in Armenia on the level of service availability and provision.

Hence, the operationalization of our research question involves first of all the definition of key variables, in particular, social protection as an independent variable and inclusive education as a dependent variable. Within this research the main components of social protection are policy notes, policy regulations, social services and programs, main international and local laws and normative acts which regulate the scope of social services and the mechanisms of collaboration between key stakeholders. All these components can contribute to the purpose of quality inclusive education implementation. On the other side, the dependent variable of the research is inclusive education, the quality of which depends on such factors as the availability and accessibility of services for children with special needs (including rehabilitation and day-care services) as well as their families, the realization of the right to participation, resources, including human resources to address the needs of the learners. Thus, it is obvious that the measurement of these intersected point leads us to the understanding of the main patterns.

Within the frames of interpretive approach the examining of the research question will allow us to find answers to such questions as “how do key stakeholders construct their collaboration within particularly the context of social and child protection and inclusive education implementation”; “what are the social processes to shape and sustain certain patterns of behavior and attitudes towards interconnectedness of social and child protection and quality inclusive education in Armenia”; “what role do social structures and institutionalized norms play in shaping of key stakeholders’ interactions in these particular fields and in respect to the above-mentioned purpose” and so on.

Methodology

Utilizing qualitative research design, this research used a combination of document analysis and key informant interviews.

- **Document analysis:** the review of laws and regulations, policy documents, reports by the government agencies and other relevant materials related to the topic.
- **In-depth semi-structured interviews** with stakeholders from social protection and inclusive education sectors covering the key policy makers on national level and regional and local level policy implementors from both public and non-profit sectors.

Organization /Authority	Number of interviews conducted
National level	
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of RA	3

Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of RA	1
Unified Social Service	1
Regional level	
Shirak Regional Administration	1
“Gegharkunik regional pedagogical-psychological support center” SNCO	1
Local/grassroots level	
Basic school, Gegharkunik Region	1
Regional center of unified social service, Shirak Region	1
NGOs	
“Bridge of Hope” NGO	1
Armenian Caritas	1
Scientific society in the field	
Associate professor, researcher (professional interests include social protection and inclusive education), Yerevan State University	1
Total:	12

The selection of the experts involved in the interviews was based on the professional connections formed as a result of the researcher's previous professional experience, and also took place through the snowball method. The selection of experts was made with the aim of collecting holistic information on both policy shaping and its adaptation and implementation processes, features and obstacles. Therefore, representatives from the fields of social protection and inclusive education were selected at the national, regional and grassroots levels. Furthermore, with the aim of imparting a scientific nuance to the empirical information, an expert with research experience in both fields, but belonging mainly to the scientific community, was also selected. The aim of this approach was to obtain a comprehensive picture of the research question and the topic.

It is very important to mention that it would be very informative also to use the method of focus group discussions with the main service providers in social/child protection and inclusive education fields aiming to identify the main patterns of intersectoral collaboration and information flow, as well as the sense by which the stakeholders would elaborate on the contribution of social protection policy and programs to inclusive education implementation in Armenia. But due to research limitations, especially time restrictions, I decided not to refer to that method within the frames of this research.

Analysis approach

To analyze the collected data, the research used qualitative thematic coding and analysis approach. Based on the research question and objectives, an initial codebook with the deductive codes (themes for the analysis) will be developed. The collected qualitative data was coded by assigning themes to specific topics and patterns in the data. This will help to identify common themes and trends related to the research question. The final step in the analysis involved

synthesizing and triangulating the finding from document review and interviews, and drawing conclusions about the relationship between social protection policies and inclusive education.

Case selection

The relevance of this case study is justified by the following crucial factors in the fields of social and child protection and education in Armenia as well as by the necessity of the realization of fundamental human rights such as the right to education:

- education is a fundamental human right, moreover, universal inclusive education fully corresponds to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the 4th goal: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"¹³.

- social and child protection policies impact education outcomes by reducing poverty and inequality, improving access to education, and promoting social inclusion.

- mainstreaming universal inclusion is a priority for the Government of Armenia, so the system of universal inclusive education in Armenia will be fully established and institutionalized only in two years (by 2025).

- limited research on the intersectoral collaboration patterns between social protection and inclusive education fields in Armenia, considering mainly the short period of inclusive education development in Armenia.

The feasibility of the research is justified by the following factors: local hard legal acts, regulations, as well as soft law materials such as guidelines and recommendations are fully

¹³ Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), available at: [https://www.sdg4education2030.org/the-goal#:~:text=Sustainable%20Development%20Goal%204%20\(SDG%204\)%20is%20the%20education%20goal&text=These%20goals%20are%20indivisible%20and,lifelong%20learning%20opportunities%20for%20all.%E2%80%9D](https://www.sdg4education2030.org/the-goal#:~:text=Sustainable%20Development%20Goal%204%20(SDG%204)%20is%20the%20education%20goal&text=These%20goals%20are%20indivisible%20and,lifelong%20learning%20opportunities%20for%20all.%E2%80%9D)

accessible (either in Armenian or in English). All the stakeholders' (including elites') written consent of participation in interviews are obtained.

The implementation of this research is strengthened by the researcher's personal and professional reflections and observations as a result of professional engagement in the project dealing with the reforms in child protection system in Armenia. Alternatively, a reflection to this research question would involve the integration of personal experience with existing literature and data in order to develop a nuanced understanding of the relationship between social and child protection policies and inclusive education implementation in Armenia.

Research ethics

In order to conduct research on this topic in an ethical manner, it is necessary to acquire informed consent from all individuals involved, maintain confidentiality and privacy ensuring that the research is “low risk”.

Informed consent refers to the process of ensuring that all the interviewees and focus group discussion participants are aware of the research topic and their rights as participants. In this case, written consent was obtained from each participant, confirming their voluntary participation.

Confidentiality is also maintained throughout the research process, with all the information collected among the participants are kept confidential and used only in a generalized manner. This ensures that the privacy of all participants is respected and protected.

Data protection is another important aspect of this research, with all data being stored securely and protected from unauthorized access. The data will be used exclusively for the purpose of the research project and will not be shared or used for any other purpose without the explicit consent of the participants.

Discussion: Contribution of Social Protection Policy to Inclusive Education Implementation in Armenia

Currently, the international community is placing significant emphasis on the issue of ensuring equal access to quality education for all individuals. This concern is underscored in key documents like the Universal Declaration on Human Rights¹⁴ from 1949, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁵ from 1989, and The World Declaration on Education for All¹⁶ adopted in 1990. In 1994, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education¹⁷ was established in Spain, outlining the core principles of inclusive education. Notably, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹⁸ adopted in 2006, represented a significant milestone in recognizing the right to education for people with disabilities. Additionally, during the 48th session of the International Conference on Education in Geneva in 2008¹⁹, several fundamental approaches were deliberated to advance the concept of inclusive education and develop programs and methodologies to support its implementation.

The gradual implementation of inclusive education in Armenia coincided with the ratification of international treaties focusing on human and child rights, as well as education. The process of integrating inclusion into Armenia's educational system began as early as 2001 through a

¹⁴ Universal declaration of human rights (art. 1), adopted by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet2Rev.1en.pdf>

¹⁵ Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text#>

¹⁶ World Declaration on Education for All, Adopted in March, 1990. Available at: <https://www.humanium.org/en/world-declaration-on-education-for-all/#:~:text=The%20ultimate%20goal%20affirmed%20by,toward%20these%20goals%20is%20measured>

¹⁷ The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June, 1994. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>

¹⁸ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2006. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

¹⁹ Defining an inclusive education agenda: reflections around the 48th session of the International Conference on Education. Available at: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/document/defining-inclusive-education-agenda-reflections-around-48th-session-international>

pilot program initiated by local NGOs in the capital, but it wasn't until 2005 that inclusive education became legally binding with the enactment of the Law on Mainstream Education of the Republic of Armenia²⁰. Additionally, the Law on Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs of the Republic of Armenia and the National Plan for the Implementation of Inclusive Education were adopted in the same year. To ensure consistency and eliminate discrimination, key provisions of these laws were incorporated into the Law on mainstream education of the Republic of Armenia in 2012. Consequently, the distinction between inclusive and non-inclusive schools will be abolished, as Armenia is committed to universal inclusion, making inclusive education available in all schools. These legislative changes will come into effect from 2025, guaranteeing a universally inclusive education system throughout Armenia.

This in turn means that services are now being implemented in schools that go beyond just providing education, and also include the type of rehabilitative services. In addition, there is currently an institute operating under the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports in Armenia, which provides psycho-pedagogical and rehabilitation services, and is also called to provide continuous training and methodical support of the pedagogical staff at school. All this is meant to ensure social inclusion in a broad sense. As a result, there have been changes in the process, procedures, and tools used to assess the needs of individuals with disabilities and special needs. One significant outcome is the implementation of functional assessments for children, aimed at creating an appropriate and fair learning environment in order to promote equal access to basic education. These changes have led to a more inclusive and equitable approach to addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities and special needs. In summary, inclusive education refers not only to the realization of the child's right to education, but also to the guarantee of equal opportunities and social equity in the entire society. Therefore,

²⁰ Հանրակրթության մասին ՀՀ օրենք (English translation: The Law on Mainstream Education of RA). Available at: <https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=155046>

inclusive education is closely related to the realization of children's rights in the Republic of Armenia and the development and implementation of the social protection policy in general. Accordingly, the system is fully consistent with the purpose of the RA Law on Child Rights and Child Protection, the Law on Social Assistance, and a number of other local legal acts. And the latter, in turn, derive from international conventions ratified by RA, such as UNCRC, UNCRPD and so on.

In light of this matter, the primary objective of social protection policy in Armenia, concerning the implementation of inclusive education, is to guarantee equitable educational opportunities for every individual, irrespective of disabilities or special needs, enabling their active engagement in the learning process. It is worth noting that social protection policies, particularly those concerning social assistance services, are strategically crafted to tackle obstacles hindering access to education and establish supportive mechanisms that foster inclusive practices within schools and communities, encompassing a range of other objectives in the process. Let us understand how the social protection system contributes to the goal of achieving quality inclusive education.

In Armenia, social protection encompasses a broad and intricate scope of activities overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, incorporating various elements such as the integration of social security, social work and social services, medical and social examination, as well as employment state agencies at the grassroots level. These interconnected components primarily aim to foster social equity and justice within the broader society. However, this particular study places its emphasis on exploring the interplay between social work and social services, and the implementation of inclusive education. Within the context of this research, we will also consider child protection programs as a complementary facet of the comprehensive social protection framework and investigate their contribution towards promoting high-quality

inclusive education in Armenia. These services in general include counseling assistance, rehabilitation assistance, including child rehabilitation services provided by Child and family support centers, in-kind assistance, as well as monetary assistance in the form of monthly social benefits or quarterly monetary assistance, legal assistance and so on²¹.

Considering this perspective, the effective presence and coordination of various factors become crucial, encompassing aspects such as ensuring accessible service provision, establishing complementary systems that do not overlap, collectively combating discrimination and reducing stigma, clearly delineating roles and responsibilities, and promoting community-level initiatives. In the realm of social protection, significant actors include regional centers for unified social services, guardianship and trusteeship commissions, departments of family, women's and children's rights' protection, as well as child and family support centers within regional governorates and the capital city of Yerevan. The interconnectedness and collaborative efforts among these actors hold paramount importance in upholding the rights of children, including their fundamental entitlement to education, while also safeguarding their best interests as a whole.

In relation to this matter, Governmental order N1044 on the "Regulation on Interdepartmental Cooperation" ratified in 2015 by the Government of the Republic of Armenia²², delineates the requirements governing the collaboration between relevant parties involved in the provision of social assistance. The Order addresses the rights and responsibilities of the cooperating parties, the forms and procedures of intersectoral cooperation, the exchange of information between the collaborating entities in terms of its volume, timeframe, and format, as well as the handling

²¹ ՀՀ Սոցիալական աջակցության մասին օրենք, հոդված 8 (The Law on Social Assistance of RA, Article 8). Accessible at: <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=94972>

²² Միջգերատեսչական համագործակցության կանոնակարգ սահմանելու մասին ՀՀ Կառավարության 1044-Ն որոշում (English translation: Governmental Order N1044 of RA on Establishing regulations on Intersectoral Cooperation). Available at: <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=100394>

of problematic cases that may indicate or potentially lead to difficult situations in an individual's life. Furthermore, the Order encompasses the monitoring and evaluation procedures related to these interactions.

Within the framework of the above-mentioned document, the parties engaged in interdepartmental cooperation include structures operating under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of the Republic of Armenia. These entities include the Unified Social Service, along with the social work and social services departments in its regional centers, child and family support centers, public schools, and territorial center for psychopedagogical support. Additionally, local self-government bodies represented by the departments responsible for family, women's, and children's rights protection, as well as the police, are also part of this cooperative network. As per the provisions of Order N1044, all these bodies are expected to contribute to a collaborative approach in assisting individuals facing challenging life circumstances, including children enrolled in inclusive education and their families.

However, the research findings indicate that the functioning of this network lacks a solid institutional foundation. There is a lack of clear resource mapping and formal documentation of these resources within a centralized database, as well as a lack of coercive mechanisms to enforce cooperation among the entities involved.

The mechanism outlined in that Order operates on a non-binding basis, functioning more as a memorandum rather than having any de facto authority. Despite the territorial centers of the unified social service being mandated, according to their charter, to convene coordinating councils and establish a support network, there is no effective initiating body. It is crucial to emphasize the significance of shifting casework from a needs assessment approach to targeted resource allocation, facilitated by unified case management and a clear division of functions.

This would ensure a more efficient and streamlined process in providing appropriate support and assistance.

Today, the network is the least effective body, because we do not have the involvement of organizations, structures that can provide real resources to solve the problems of different beneficiaries. In other words, we simply know institutions implementing programs in the public sector, NGO sector, and individuals through our personal connections. Even now, nothing new has been added, network performance has not been improved.

Representative of public sector

In RA, a person with all his connections works best in case if there is not a clear and mandatory mechanism of formal collaboration or the mechanism does not work properly. However, there is a need for experts with specific expertise who can provide focused referrals, interventions, and problem-solving based on a thorough assessment of the individual's needs. Unfortunately, the lack of professionals with specialized knowledge often leads to a halt in case management after the assessment of the child's and family's social needs. This highlights the importance of addressing the gap in specialized professionals to ensure comprehensive support and assistance.

Representative of NGO

In this regard, in addition to the lack of specialists in the narrow field, two more important problems are put forward, namely, the lack of a unified toolkit and the ambiguity of functions among the key actors operating in the field. Let us address these gaps in the field and clarify how they relate to the implementation of quality inclusive education.

In the context of the policy adopted by the Republic of Armenia, all children should have equal opportunities and receive appropriate education through universal inclusion in all public

schools and kindergartens. That is, education according to standards drawn up with reasonable adjustments, individualized curriculum according to human capabilities. Moreover, by inclusive education we mean not only children with health problems, but also super talented children, who can also be considered children with special needs. However, the implementation of inclusive education is not limited to the services provided within the school or in the education sector. Although not all children in school need social protection, the sector still has a lot to do in ensuring that the rights of all children are realized and protected.

Not attending school is known to be one of the primary indicators of limiting a child's right to education, which itself can lead to social exclusion along with socioeconomic status, discrimination, and other barriers. The issue of dropping out of education needs to be considered not only from the prism of education, but also from the prism of social protection, because its causes can go beyond the scope of the organization of education. In this case, as research data points out, one of the biggest gaps in intersectoral cooperation is that there is actually no unified toolkit for working with the case. The government regulates the legal relations regarding the identification and guidance of school-aged children who are left out of compulsory education through the Governmental Order N154²³. According to this decision, in the case of identifying children aged 6-18 who do not attend a public educational institution, including those who do not receive home education or are not registered in any educational institution, the data of these children should be presented in the electronic system for identifying children who are excluded from compulsory education. This database should be accessible to a number of key stakeholders, including the guardianship and trusteeship body, republican and territorial centers for psychopedagogical support centers, the Ministry of Labor

²³ Պարտադիր կրթությունից դուրս մնացած երեխաների բացահայտման և ուղղորդման կարգը սահմանելու մասին ՀՀ Կառավարության 154-Ն որոշում (English translation: Governmental Order N154 of RA On defining the procedure for identification and referral of children excluded from compulsory education). Available at: <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=149923>

and Social Affairs with its relevant divisions, the police, regional administrations and so on. But the problem lies in the fact that the mechanism established by the government does not actually work because the database has not yet been established and put into operation.

This also presents an opportunity to enhance interdepartmental collaboration and ensure the active involvement and contribution of the social protection system in the effective implementation of inclusive education. However, a significant challenge arises from the fact that the Order N154 has been in effect for over two years, yet there is no existing electronic database containing information on children who are currently excluded from accessing education. Moreover, the cooperation aimed at upholding children's rights and resolving issues relies heavily on the goodwill and commitment of professionals involved. In certain regions, for instance, it is the conscientious and motivated specialist from the governor's office who takes the initiative, while in other regions, the impetus may come not from an NGO representative or another expert in the field.

Representative of public sector

The contradiction between the de jure and de facto implementation of the current decision undermines the systematic efforts to enhance the quality of inclusive education and achieve universal inclusion.

The incomplete flow of information within the social protection sector itself intensifies the gap in the database, which is contrary to the best interests of the child and the imperative of creating comprehensive opportunities for the fulfillment of their fundamental rights. Currently, the social protection system operates the “Manuk”²⁴ database, which contains data on children facing challenging life situations. Accurate and thorough collection of this data is crucial as it

²⁴ «Մանուկ» տեղեկատվական համակարգ. literally translated from Armenian into English as "Child" database

should inform decisions that contribute to the successful implementation of child rights protection reforms in Armenia. However, experts highlight that the issue lies in the fact that this database primarily reflects the needs assessment data rather than the outcomes of the intervention process and monitoring. Furthermore, there is no integration between this database and the database specifically designed for children with disabilities, which focuses on capturing information regarding this vulnerable group. This indicates an existing gap in standard practices within the field, and it becomes evident that the presence and functionality of these databases do not effectively demonstrate the interconnectedness of social protection and inclusive education.

Apart from the formal need to have a complete data base, the results of the research indicate that information about students who are out of education and at risk of social exclusion is not comprehensively and fully obtained through information flows between state institutions.

Even if the student's issue is seen in the field of social protection structures, the school should be compassionate and follow the issue of its student's education. But the school has always hidden information about children not attending school, the absence has no reason. In the case of our regional governor's office, we find out from various sources, even when attending a wedding ceremony, that someone's, for example, a neighbor's child is not attending school, and we go the way of clarifying and evaluating that issue. In our case, the initiative comes from us, but in reality, we should have received that information through formal channels from the school.

Representative of public sector

Meanwhile, according to the Law of RA on Mainstream Education, according to one of the powers of the principle of a public school, the principle must take steps to ensure social

protection, including figuring out the problem of children who do not attend school, and alerting the relevant state bodies, in particular, the territorial center of the unified social service²⁵. However, experts note that they do not always manage to really ensure the inclusion of these children in the field of education, because there is no mechanism of coercion and control.

We acknowledge the school's responsibility to raise concerns, but there is a need for clarity regarding the enforcement mechanism. It is essential to determine which entity should assume this role: the governor's office, the local community, the police, or the unified social service. The lack of clear guidelines leads to a reluctance to take on this commitment and assume responsibility. Consequently, some children choose not to attend school, citing financial difficulties at home as a reason. They may opt to work and contribute earnings to their households instead.

Representative of public sector

The evident social protection gap becomes apparent in these matters. In this regard, the state is left with no alternative, as the social protection system is actively seeking long-term solutions and implementing reforms. Furthermore, within the context of inclusive education, social protection encompasses not only children with health issues and special educational needs but also economically disadvantaged children. As highlighted by an expert in inclusive education, "everything is measured materially, because even if there is a risk of violence, there are specialists who place the availability of accommodation higher than, for example, the risk of physical violence." This emphasizes the need to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of non-material support programs within the social protection system. This, in turn, will foster

alternative solutions to address non-monetary poverty, with a crucial emphasis on the necessity and priority of eliminating such forms of poverty.

The existence of poverty and special needs also reinforces the risks of stigmatization and discrimination among children and the community and the wider society, as well as in the realm of social protection objectives.

For example, if you ask community leaders how many children there are who have special needs or special educational conditions, none of them will be able to answer. However, if you ask how many disabled children there are in the community, they will tell you the exact number. This does not contribute to strengthening the concept of universal inclusion in people's mindsets, but merely indicates differentiation and emphasis on vulnerable groups, setting them apart from others.

Representative of NGO

In this context, the operational effectiveness of social protection policy remains incomplete as long as there are factors that contribute to social exclusion, such as discrimination and division, within the broader segments of society. The primary objective of social protection policy is to foster social justice and equality. Additionally, as noted by the expert, a significant challenge in social protection lies in promoting a culture of non-discrimination and inclusive thinking within the country. This necessitates close collaboration with representatives from the sector of education and aligning joint objectives to attain the desired outcome.

Today's steps to promote changes in mindset are insufficient. We have been implementing inclusive education programs in the region since 2010, and I can confirm that there is mutual help, empathy, and care towards children with physical disabilities in their classes. But along with that there are still many negative cases. For example, parents may resist having children

with behavioral problems in the same class as their children and express this fear. There is a divisive attitude among teachers. This is a mindset issue. Therefore, I believe that social protection still has a lot to do in analyzing and revising its awareness raising policy.

Representative of NGO

Therefore, considering the specific services examined within the scope of this research, the primary operating structures encompass mainstream schools and the regional psychopedagogical support centers under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports, as well as the unified social service and family and child support centers under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, prioritizing social issues. Let's briefly outline the scope of activities and services provided by each of these structures.

Addressing our research question, it is important to highlight that in addition to pedagogical services, psychological services are also mandatory within schools in Armenia. However, due to heavy workload, these specialists are unable to fully provide their services to all children in need. Consequently, the inclusive education system in Armenia includes a separate structure that supports schools with its functions, namely the Republican Psycho-pedagogical Center of the Organization of Education, along with its regional Psycho-pedagogical Centers situated in each region, including the capital Yerevan. The purpose of these centers is to provide necessary rehabilitation services to children, offer counseling support to parents when needed, and provide methodological support to the pedagogical and psychological staff of schools.

The government of Armenia has established guidelines for the provision of pedagogical psychological support services within the education system, including the various levels at which these services are offered. As per the government's decision, the regional centers provide

pedagogical-psychological support services to learners, encompassing speech therapy, typhlopädagog, deaf-pädagog, oligophrenopädagog, psychology, and social pedagogy²⁶.

Assessment of educational needs and identification of required services are conducted by specialists within schools and regional pedagogic-psychological support centers. Subsequently, the child receives professional rehabilitative services from appropriate specialists within the school or regional center, such as psychologists, speech therapists, and others. These functions fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports.

However, there are also children who are served by structures operating under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. For instance, they may receive services at day care centers like the Child and Family Support Center. These centers also assess the child's needs and provide rehabilitative services, including the expertise of psychologists, speech therapists, and other specialists. However, an issue arises concerning the improper allocation and utilization of resources, resulting in insufficient outcomes sometimes.

Representative of public sector

It appears that the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs operates day care centers that offer similar services. Moreover, the Ministry strives to address the service gaps of the Child and Family Support Centers, which fall under its jurisdiction, by decentralizing services and expanding their geographic coverage through state delegated services. To achieve this, the Ministry collaborates with non-governmental organizations capable of providing these services to children and their parents, particularly those facing challenging life circumstances, including disabilities and special needs. However, this approach gives rise to the issue of service

²⁶ Կրթության կազմակերպման մանկավարժափոփոխական աջակցության ծառայությունների տրամադրման կարգ (English translation: The Procedure of the Provision of Psychopedagogical Services for the Organization of Education). Available at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=172767>

transformation, as the centers under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs also provide rehabilitation services such as psychological consultation, intervention, support from social pedagogues, speech therapists, and other specialists.

The services of the day-care centers fill the gap in the services in the school, as the services of the regional psychopedagogical support center are not sufficient enough due to insufficient number of specialists, limited number of hours, wide geographical coverage.

Representative of public sector

In cases where a child receiving inclusive education is the beneficiary of these services, there is not only a challenge in effectively allocating resources, but also an ethical concern arises when, for instance, two psychologists simultaneously work with the same child. Additionally, there is a need for information exchange and coordination to develop and implement the most effective intervention plan for the child. However, according to representatives from the sector of education, the transformation of services and the ethical concern are unwarranted, as the services provided by the school and the regional psycho-pedagogical center are primarily focused on educational matters, according to the expert in the field of inclusive education. Nonetheless, there is a lack of adequate information exchange between these professionals and their respective structures, which hampers the establishment of a coherent work program and shared goals. This impedes the full utilization of resources to address the child's needs and facilitate progress not only within the educational setting but also in other crucial aspects of their life.

However, the state lacks a clear mechanism to define the functions and boundaries of intervention among these professionals when working with the same specific case.

Furthermore, there is a lack of proper cooperation and communication mechanisms between these specialists within the state.

In practice, cooperation and information flow occur based on the personal initiative of specialists who are passionate about their work and the potential outcome for the child in difficult situation.

Representative of NGO

The issue stems from the lack of standardized guidelines for day care services, despite each center, delegated service provider, and winning non-governmental organization having their own charter outlining the services they offer. There is a need for clear standards that define the objectives, tasks, referral mechanisms, and communication channels among various structures and stakeholders involved in these services.

It is critical to analyze the elements that connect these two areas while considering their interdependence. As inclusive education is widely recognized as a big success, techniques and methodologies to improve it are constantly changing. These efforts include not just anti-discriminatory measures, but also the adoption of appropriate changes. The government of the Republic of Armenia is not an exception in recognizing the importance of inclusive education and trying to enhance it.

In accordance with Governmental Order N1265²⁷, a procedure was established for the provision of reasonable accommodations, with a strong emphasis on promoting universal inclusion in the education sector as a key aspect of educational policy. Reasonable accommodations aim to support individuals with disabilities by addressing functional

²⁷ Խելամիտ հարմարեցումներ ապահովելու կարգը սահմանելու մասին ՀՀ Կառավարության 1265-Ն Որոշում (English translation: Governmental order N1265 on establishing a procedure for providing reasonable accommodations). Available at: <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=167278>

limitations that may hinder their full participation in the educational process. By providing appropriate reasonable accommodations, individuals will have the opportunity to effectively carry out the required activities and actively engage in the educational process on an equal basis with their peers.

However, the organization of education is not solely dependent on educational programs, methodologies, or reasonable accommodations within schools. It also relies on addressing various social aspects, such as providing adequate transportation and improving road infrastructure. Without these essential elements, a child may face barriers in simply accessing the school premises. Therefore, meeting basic needs, including transportation, plays a crucial role in ensuring the right to education. Furthermore, education itself is recognized as one of the most vital means to combat poverty.

In sum, it can be stated that Armenia, as a monist country that upholds the values of human rights and education, has ratified key international conventions and aligned its local legislation accordingly. These legislative efforts align with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 1 (No Poverty) and 4 (Quality Education). However, despite the existence of comprehensive legal frameworks, the practical implementation of these laws reveals gaps and challenges. This is evident in both the domains of social protection and inclusive education. These gaps impede the effective and targeted implementation of social protection policies and programs within inclusive education, leading to disagreements in collaboration and the absence of clear mechanisms.

Conclusion

We are currently witnessing a remarkable commitment from the Government of the Republic of Armenia to realize fundamental human rights and foster social equity. This commitment is evidenced by the key international conventions ratified by the state in the fields of human and child rights, as well as the developed local legal acts and policy recommendations based on those conventions. Such measures play a crucial role in guiding comprehensive reforms and safeguarding the interests of society in both interconnected and distinct domains. By investing significant resources in these endeavors, the government is signaling its determination to create a society that upholds the fundamental principles of justice, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all.

This paper in general and the research findings in particular have demonstrated that ideas and issues regarding universal inclusion cannot be effectively addressed and resolved without considering the broader aspects of poverty, including non-monetary poverty factors, social exclusion, as well as discriminative attitudes towards vulnerable groups from the society. The recognition of these interconnected factors is crucial for tackling the challenges associated with the purpose to achieve universal inclusiveness. In this context, It is crucial to emphasize the significant role of social protection in achieving this goal, along with the child protection system and related programs playing a complementary role in Armenia.

The study findings indicate that there are not only service gaps but also instances of overlapping services, particularly rehabilitation services for children with special needs. These overlaps highlight the ineffective distribution of resources, which is detrimental to the interests of the state, beneficiary children and their families, as well as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture. It has become evident that certain rehabilitation services provided by entities under the jurisdiction of both authorities are

duplicated. Although education experts claim that these services are solely related to educational organization, the literature and opinions of other experts demonstrate that addressing the challenges of inclusive education and universal inclusion solely within the realm of education will not yield the desired comprehensive outcomes. Furthermore, the research data reveals that there is a lack of clear differentiation between these services in both contextual and technical dimensions, and there is a lack of practical institutional mechanisms for communication and information exchange among service providers. These issues, along with other challenges, give rise to ethical concerns, primarily for the beneficiaries. The mentioned problem is closely tied to communication gaps between the departments, and the solution lies in investing in and implementing well-structured mechanisms for information flow.

Through the analysis of various documents related to this topic, this research has identified legislative acts and legal regulations that serve as the institutional foundation for addressing the outlined problems and advancing the sector. These regulations not only define key concepts and objectives but also outline the types of services and modes of communication among stakeholders. However, there exists a disconnect between the existing *de jure* regulations and their *de facto* implementation. This results in either incomplete realization of the state policy goals and outcomes at the institutional level or a reliance on personal connections among conscientious and responsible professionals to achieve desired results. The research findings point to the lack of binding intersectoral cooperation regulations as the main contributing factor to this situation. Without specific and binding mechanisms for clear delineation of responsibilities and case management, progress is hindered.

Additionally, the research highlights another obstacle in addressing the identified issues: the absence or incompleteness of databases. This deficiency encompasses not only the lack of interdepartmental data sharing platforms but also the inadequacy of the specific department's

database, in particular, within the field of social and child protection. Such deficiencies are detrimental to the child's interests and impede the effective implementation of quality inclusive education in Armenia. It also undermines the targeted and meaningful contribution of social protection programs in this regard.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned points, the recommended approach is to convene all relevant agencies and stakeholders at a collaborative platform. Inclusive education strives to achieve equal opportunities and high-quality education for all students, including those with disabilities and special needs, as a fundamental objective. On the other hand, the relevant authorities responsible for social protection have a duty to promote the welfare and social integration of vulnerable individuals and communities. Thus, it is obvious that both inclusive education and social protection, including child protection, share in general at least one common ultimate goal: fostering the development of an inclusive society, promoting social equity, and ensuring social justice. In the context of this research, the entities operating under the control of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, as well as the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture, should initiate and actively participate in a constructive dialogue, comprehensively discuss the areas where their responsibilities intersect, and intend to reach consensus. Therefore, strong inter-agency collaboration between these two entities can contribute to the provision of holistic support aimed at targeting and addressing not only educational needs, but also wider social, socio-economic and other barriers that prevent children from realizing their full potential and empowering their families.

Thus, the results of the research clearly showed that in order to ensure children's access to quality education and social inclusion, the systematic and joint development of social protection and inclusive education activities is highly important. This approach can ensure that holistic funding will be allocated for the implementation of quality inclusive education, a legal

framework and implementation guidelines will be provided on a unified basis. This systematic approach will in turn guarantee one of the most important principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, that no one is left behind the educational system. Moreover, the result of these actions will be attitudinal changes, as misunderstandings and biases in the collaborative relationship are discussed and brought to a better agreement.

The key outcome of these discussions should be the establishment of well-defined mechanisms for service provision and efficient management of information flows. Additionally, for the highest effectiveness of results it is crucial that all level key stakeholders including national decision-makers, regional policy implementers, grassroots program implementers, and program beneficiaries are engaged in the process of ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Together, they can assess the specific support requirements and determine the most effective means of delivering assistance through inter-agency collaboration and interconnectedness. By adopting this approach, they can actively contribute to the realization of the goal of achieving high-quality inclusive education in Armenia.

Reference List

1. Anand P., Jones S., Doroghue M. and Tetler J. (2020) “Non-monetary poverty and deprivation: A capability approach”. Journal of European Social Policy (Vol.3)
2. Armstrong A.C. and Spandagou I. (2009). “Poverty, Inclusion and Inclusive Education: exploring the connections”. Paper presented at the AARE Annual Conference, Canberra 2009
3. Babajanian, B. (2013) “Social Protection and its contribution to social inclusion”. London: Overseas Development Institute
4. Burnett, N. (2009). Foreword. “In Policy guidelines on inclusion in education”. Paris: UNESCO.
5. Cecchini S. (2014) “Social Protection, Poverty and Inequality: A Comparative Perspective”. Journal of Southeast Asian Economies (JSEAE), Volume 31, Number 1
6. Cecchini, Simone and Martínez, Rodrigo (2012) “Inclusive Social Protection in Latin America: A Comprehensive, Rights-Based Approach”. Libro de la CEPAL, Vol. 111, Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2009321
7. de Haan, A. (1999) “Social Exclusion: Towards an Holistic Understanding of Deprivation”. London: Department for International Development
8. de la Brière, B. and Rawlings, L. B. (2006) “Examining Conditional Cash Transfer Programs: A Role for Increased Social Inclusion?” Social Protection Discussion Paper No. 0603. Washington, D.C.: World Bank
9. Holzmann R. and Jorgensen S (2009) “Social Risk Management: A New Conceptual Framework for Social Protection and Beyond. World Bank”. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/932501468762357711/pdf/multi-page.pdf>

10. Ismoilov B. (2021) “Issues Of Social Protection Of Children With Disabilities In The Context Of Inclusive Education In Uzbekistan”. *The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology* (ISSN – 2693-0803)
11. Kidd S. (2017) “Social exclusion and access to social protection schemes, *Journal of Development Effectiveness*”, 9:2, 212-244, DOI: 10.1080/19439342.2017.1305982
12. Mkandawire, T. (2001) “Social Policy in a Development Context”. *Social Policy and Development Programme Paper 7*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)
13. Nolan, B. and Whelan, T. C. (2010) “Using non-monetary deprivation indicators to analyze poverty and social exclusion: Lessons from Europe?”.
14. Peters M.A. and Besley Tina A.C (2014) “Social Exclusion/Inclusion: Foucault's analytics of exclusion, the political ecology of social inclusion and the legitimization of inclusive education”. *Open Review of Educational Research*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2014.972439>
15. Ruggeri Laderchi, C., Saith, R., and Stewart, D. (2003) “Does it Matter that we Don't Agree on the Definition of Poverty? A Comparison of Four Approaches”. *Queen Elizabeth House (QEH) Working Paper Series 107*. Oxford: University of Oxford.
16. Sabates-Wheeler, R. and Devereux, S. (2008) “Transformative Social Protection: the Currency of Social Justice”, Barrientos A., and Hulme, D. (eds.) *Social Protection for the Poor and Poorest: Concepts, Policies and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York.
17. Silver, H. (2007) “The Process of Social Exclusion: the Dynamics of an Evolving Concept”. *CPRC Working Paper 95*. Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre
18. Wagle U. (2009) “Multidimensional Poverty Measurement: Concepts and Applications”. New York