



# Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools 2030 Contexts

Country profiles | Kyrgyzstan

## COUNTRY PROFILES

## Kyrgyzstan



### Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Kyrgyzstan recognises inclusive education and the rights of learners with disabilities to learn in regular settings, however learners with disabilities remain largely excluded from the education system.<sup>1</sup> Since 2019, inclusive education has been defined as the ‘process of ensuring equal access to education for all students, taking into account the diversity of the educational needs and individual capabilities’.<sup>2</sup> The term ‘Special educational needs’ is used to refer to ‘learners whose needs require creating special conditions and environments, as well as the use of special technologies, within the provision of education services.’<sup>3</sup> UNICEF note that the used definition of disability as per the 2008 [Law on the Rights and Guarantees of Persons with Disabilities](#) reflects the medical concept of disability and is not in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Person’s

with Disabilities.<sup>4</sup> The medical model conceptualises disability as a condition, illness or disease that needs to be treated and cured through medical intervention, as opposed to the more recent social model that understands disability as the interaction between an individual with specific impairments (whether physical, intellectual, sensory or mental health related) and the surrounding social and cultural environment.<sup>5</sup> Kyrgyzstan’s legal framework states that education for learners with disabilities is to be provided in regular settings and in special institutions when necessary, and that special and regular schools should work in partnership to facilitate this. The idea of inclusive education has been endorsed through various policies however current provisions are not regarded as sufficient to ensure the rights of children with disabilities are fulfilled.<sup>6</sup>

#### Views from teachers and programme staff

AKF staff shared that there are ongoing debates in the country on how inclusive education should look and how this should be defined in the Kyrgyzstan context.

For example, whilst UNICEF describe and promote inclusive education as the inclusion of children with learning and physical disabilities, there are some national level experts that believe that inclusive education should be expanded to cover broader groups of children that are also at risk of being excluded from the education system, such as children who have deviant behaviour, those who come from poor households, children of migrant parents and orphaned children.

As such, there are disagreements over how to define the concept and over the proposed model which targets children with disabilities, in that some view this as too narrow an approach which doesn’t address the scope of all children at risk.

One teacher expressed that to her inclusive education stands for the creation of an inclusive classroom which focuses on abilities, not disabilities, and welcomes all children together regardless of ability or background.

‘Children with SEND’ or ‘children with disabilities’ was perceived to be the most commonly used terms to describe students with disabilities. Again, the fact that different stakeholders have differing opinions was brought up, suggesting that different stakeholders may use different terminology.

**‘Without quality education in mainstream schools and adequate information for parents about the right to inclusive education, children with disabilities will remain at risk of being segregated in residential institutions or isolated in the confines of their home, receiving little to no education.’**

Preschool teacher, Naryn



### Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

It is difficult to quantify how many learners may have learning disabilities in Kyrgyzstan as the data is unclear. Data collected on children in education often doesn’t include children with disabilities as they are mostly attending segregated settings, though data collected by NGOs estimates that a high proportion of learners with disabilities are not attending school.<sup>7</sup>

## Country profiles | Kyrgyzstan



### Policy and legislative commitments

Kyrgyzstan has domesticated international legislation such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child through the 2006 Code of the Kyrgyz Republic on Children. The rights of learners with disabilities to learn in regular settings is promoted in the 2008 [Law on the Rights and Guarantees of Persons with Disabilities](#). However, Kyrgyzstan's [2012-20 Education Development Strategy](#) had among its objectives to promote inclusive education while maintaining specialised schools for children with special needs.

The strategy also outlined plans for the development of new curricula, models and programmes of in-service training for teachers working both in special schools and in regular schools embracing an inclusive education programme. The more recent [2019–23 State Concept for the Development of Inclusive Education](#) aims to lay the groundwork to be able to develop the education system towards inclusion in the areas of diagnosis, curriculum, special services, support and rehabilitation services, monitoring and evaluation.<sup>8</sup>



### Teacher training provision on inclusive education

Plans were laid out in the 2018-20 Action Plan for Educational Development (APED) for the development of training modules for pre-and in-service teachers working in specialised settings and regular schools to implement inclusive education programmes within the EU-funded multi-annual action programme.<sup>9</sup> AKF staff noted that the Republican Teacher Training Institution had developed these however funding limitations and disagreement at national level means that efforts to roll out the

training model are currently on pause. There are no other national level trainings specifically to help teachers support disabled learners, though some training may be provided by NGOs. Teachers may also seek information on their own, or work closely with parents to understand more about the child's needs.

This experience was reflected by one of the teachers consulted, who had not attended a training programme on teaching learners with special needs. However, she had sought out

opportunities to learn more about this topic independently, such as through attending short courses. These tend to have been developed and delivered in Russian, as there are few training resources in the Kyrgyz language.

She felt that training in Kyrgyz would be beneficial for teachers especially in learning about different teaching methodology for learners with disabilities.

**'I think it would be beneficial if different trainings on teaching children with special learning needs in the Kyrgyz language were included, especially when it comes to the methodology of teaching.'**

Pre-school teacher, Naryn



### Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Whilst disability is generally understood and defined in the medical sense, the assessment and registration of children with special education needs falls under the responsibility of the Medical-Social Commission of Experts, and the Psycho-Medical-Pedagogical Commission (PMPC), which sit under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Education and Science. According to the literature, children undergo an initial medical-social identification which is carried out in a hospital by the Ministry of Health, before being assessed by a multiprofessional team and referred to the appropriate services.

Even if there is limited knowledge amongst teachers, one teacher illustrated how a child may get support for a speech disorder from her

experience teaching children aged 3-4 years old from a trained 'teacher-defectologist'.

**'The teacher-defectologist, who conducts an in-depth examination of children with disabilities, determines a plan for correctional and developmental work with each child, implements it, and monitors the dynamics of the development of the learner; provides organisational and methodological assistance to other teachers on issues of integrated education and upbringing of children, including the approach to assessing the child in the classroom.'**

<sup>1</sup> Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter: Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022) | <sup>2</sup> Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | <sup>3</sup> Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | <sup>4</sup> UNICEF, 2021 | <sup>5</sup> Hunt & Belegu-Caka (at the request of UNICEF), 2017 | <sup>6</sup> UNICEF, 2021 | <sup>7</sup> UNICEF, 2021 | <sup>8</sup> Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | <sup>9</sup> Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

## Country profiles | Kyrgyzstan

**A speech therapist, who identifies speech disorders in children and conducts corrective work to overcome them, participates in the development of speech skills in the general educational environment.**

**The speech therapist also develops recommendations for the child assessment system surrounding oral and written responses.'**

Pre-school teacher, Naryn

Additionally, she commented that teachers are unable to discuss any observations they have about a child with school leaders or the child's family if they aren't learning as expected. Respondents noted that there are no diagnostic tools in place within the education system, and that those used by medical professionals are all in Russian. Overall, children may be able to access experts to help with their diagnosis, but often this is down to families being persistent, with limited access to doctors being a common challenge.

**'In general, the development of a system for assessing educational achievements and adaptation to the needs of students with special educational needs is in high demand at the level of the general education program.'**

Pre-school teacher, Naryn

to learn in regular classes however in urban areas there are sometimes people who are against having their children in classes together with physically disabled children, due to negative attitudes. It was noted that sometimes even school-parent committees may show bias against certain students attending with other children.

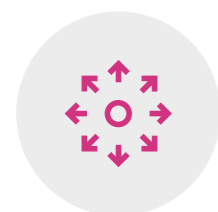
**'Overall my personal observation is that the general societal attitude towards children with disabilities is changing for the better. I'm really happy about that. Until you speak about the topic**

**the issues won't be solved. The majority is acknowledging the importance of inclusion.'**

AKF Kyrgyzstan staff member

Reflecting on their own experience at school during the rule of the Soviet Union, one respondent felt that nowadays people are speaking about disability rights much more.

As a result, some of the barriers that prevented people getting help are coming down. She felt that efforts from government, NGOs and civil society to help public awareness raising are positively affecting the situation.



### Current attitudes and awareness of inclusive practice and disability

AKF staff felt that there is a general understanding among teachers and school leaders of inclusive education and disability, however that this is fairly surface level. For instance, one staff member cited research that found that teachers, school leaders and principles have poor understanding of inclusion and learning disabilities.

This could be explained because until 2019 there was very little information available on the state of learning for children with learning or physical disabilities in Kyrgyzstan.

Teachers are generally very eager to support these learners but in most cases this is based on their empathy. Learners with disabilities are able



## Country profiles | Kyrgyzstan



### Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Data from the nongovernmental sector claims that only one fifth of all children with disabilities are attending school.<sup>10</sup> AKF staff explained that those not attending are entitled to receive education at home. However, there is no quality assurance system in place for education received at home in this way, nor a mechanism to ensure these teachers are adequately trained. Until 2019 most children with disabilities were placed in special institution or were in regular schools in separate classes. In rural areas it was more common for disabled learners to be kept at home, whereas in urban areas most families would place their children with disabilities in special institutions. AKF staff reported that there are only 18 schools

remaining who accommodate children with special needs in Kyrgyzstan. It was felt that there is a clear consensus that the system should be working towards closing down special institutions but it was acknowledged that the current push to close special institutions should be done very gradually and carefully. The teacher felt that ideally support for learners with disabilities would be provided by specially trained teachers. At present, classroom materials and the national curriculum haven't yet been adapted for learners with disabilities. When asked about where any support that is or has been provided has come from, the teacher mentioned that it is mainly local NGOs working on inclusive education.



### Challenges and priorities

Whilst efforts have been made in policy documents to promote inclusive education, guidelines are sometimes contradictory and practice remains influenced by negative attitudes towards learners with disabilities, which still remain a major factor in exclusion from education. Enrolment and levels of learning outcomes vary across geographical

regions and by language of instruction, and a significant amount of internal migration to Bishkek and Osh has further strained education services and infrastructure. The OECD have highlighted a lack of cooperation across ministries as a major hindrance to the effective implementation of inclusive education.

Inadequate teacher education and a lack of materials are also constraining factors in the implementation of inclusive pedagogical approaches.<sup>11</sup> Staff and teachers consulted concurred that stigmatising attitudes and systemic barriers are some of the most significant factors preventing inclusive education ever taking off in school settings.

A recent paper from UNICEF recommends that the Kyrgyzstan government and development partners halt the current Concept and Program for Inclusive Education in the Kyrgyz Republic project until a full review is carried out of existing documents to ensure inclusive

education is in line with international norms – particularly given that existing intervention is almost exclusively limited to medical services.<sup>12</sup> The country does not currently have a policy for implementing early identification and intervention, relying on a fragmented approach involving many ministries. Investment in research and evaluation is also required given the scant data and academic evidence available on the topic in the Kyrgyzstan context. In terms of priorities, staff and teachers felt that there needs to be investment in school infrastructure, pre- and in-service training and awareness raising with parents.

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, 2021 | <sup>11</sup> Kyrgyzstan - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | <sup>12</sup> UNICEF, 2021



**‘The process of inclusion into community life and education should be accompanied by raising public awareness in the media, social networks, and public events to promote an alternative perception of disability.’**

Pre-school teacher, Naryn



# Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools2030 Contexts

## References

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