

LABOUR MARKET (RE-)INTEGRATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – KAZAKHSTAN

Country note

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PREFACE

The Country Note presents the situation in Kazakhstan related to labour market (re-)integration and skills development for persons with disabilities with special attention on the role of Active Labour Market Policy and Measures.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) initiated a mapping of policies and programmes for labour market (re-)integration and skills development for persons with disabilities in several Partner countries, in response to the European Union's priority to foster social inclusion and economic autonomy of persons with disabilities through employment, as per priorities set out in the EU Disability Employment Package.

The main objectives were to conduct a systemic, comparative policy analysis of the support for employment of persons with disabilities and to identify needs for strengthening the capacity of actors in selected EU neighbouring countries.

The analysis was conducted in accordance with the framework proposed by the EU Disability Employment Package, with a particular focus on Active Labour Market Policies and skills development dimensions.

In Kazakhstan, the methodology consisted of desk review and face-to-face and online interviews with main stakeholders active in the area of promotion of employment and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The list of interviewees appears in annex.

1. CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

1.1 Context

Kazakhstan, located in Central Asia, has a population of 20 243 981 people as of November 2024¹. In 2023, the employment rate among those who are 15 and older was reported to be 65.2%; for the same period, unemployment rate is recorded as 4.7% with 452 200 people unemployed. In 2023, the female employment rate stood at 60%, which is comparatively high but still lower than the male employment rate of 70.9%².

As of 1 November 2024, approximately 732 000 persons with disabilities (PwD) resided in Kazakhstan, representing around 3.6% of the total population. Among them, 58% live in urban areas, while 42% reside in rural regions. Men comprise 55.7% of the PwD population (404 000), and women account for 44.3% (320 900). About 57% of PwD are of working age (418 700), while 27% are 65 years old or older (201 100) and 15% are children (112 300) (gov.kz, 2024³).

Kazakhstan has made significant progress in safeguarding the rights and improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities through recent legislative and policy changes. The nation's legal framework, including the Constitution and the Social Code (enacted in 2023), upholds the principles of equality and non-discrimination for all citizens, including PwD. By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its Optional Protocol, Kazakhstan has formally committed to promoting the social and economic inclusion of PwD.

Since 2020, several key reforms have been implemented. These include the introduction of quotas for PwD representation in the Mazhilis of the Parliament to ensure adequate representation for PwD, women and youth, with at least 30% of seats reserved for these groups⁴. Additionally, the establishment of the Commissioner for Socially Vulnerable Populations in 2023 by presidential decree aims to address the needs of PwD and other vulnerable groups. Initiatives such as the Inclusive Parliament and the Council for Inclusion aim to enhance the quality of life for PwD and foster inclusive policymaking in Kazakhstan.

National policy documents, such as the National Development Plan, covering the period up to 2025, and the Social Development Concept until 2030, emphasise sustainability, inclusivity and reforms in social policy. These strategies aim to enhance social protection, healthcare and educational accessibility for PwD, while at the same time, support broader goals for sustainable economic development.

Despite these legislative and policy advances, Kazakhstan still faces challenges in achieving full social and economic inclusion for PwD. Educational barriers persist, which translates to fewer employment opportunities. Many public and private buildings are still not fully accessible (United Nations Development Programme, 2022⁵). Limited upskilling, reskilling and lifelong learning opportunities are

¹ Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Website, [online]. Last accessed 4 November 2024 at: <https://stat.gov.kz/en/>.

² Bureau of National Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Employment and Unemployment Statistics, [online]. Last accessed 1 November 2024 at: <https://stat.gov.kz/en/industries/labor-and-income/stat-empt-unempl/publications/163686/>.

³ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Press News, [online]. Last accessed 2 November 2024 at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/press/news/details/877931?lang=ru>.

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Kazakhstan Parliament Data, [online]. Last accessed 31 October 2024 at: <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/KZ/KZ-LC01/>.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kazakhstan, Не оставь никого позади: доступность зданий для людей с инвалидностью, [online]. Last accessed 2 November 2024 at: <https://www.undp.org/ru/kazakhstan/blog/ne-ostavit-nikogo-pozadi-dostupnost-zdaniy-dlya-lyudey-s-invalidnostyu>.

also listed as another challenge⁶. Additionally, limited awareness of existing support programmes among both employers and PwD further diminishes the effectiveness of these initiatives, underscoring the need for enhanced outreach and education efforts.

1.2 The situation of persons with disabilities

According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan's, the employment rate for PwD was 39% (age groups of 15-63 for men and 15-58 for women) as of 1 November 2024 (Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, 2024⁷). Among employed PwD, 70.7% are classified as Group 3, which indicates less severe impairments that allow them to work with fewer workplace adaptations.

Employment figures are currently estimated using mandatory pension contribution records (OPV). However, PwD with Group I and II disability status may be legally exempt from pension contributions, meaning that their formal employment may not appear in OPV-based statistics and could therefore be undercounted. To improve accuracy, authorities are considering complementing or recalibrating the measurement approach using social contribution records, which would better capture employment among those not contributing to the pension system.

At the same time, statistical data on PwD employment remains incomplete. When official figures are requested, information is typically provided only for Group III, while data for Groups I and II often have to be collected informally, raising concerns about reliability and comparability. This limits the evidence base for policymaking and makes it difficult to assess the full scope of PwD employment.

The employment of PwD spans various professions: 21% are professionals and specialists, 19% are unskilled labourers, 13% work as technical specialists, and 11% hold positions as managers, civil servants or service industry workers. In terms of sectors, the majority of employed PwD (28%) work in science and research, followed by 12% in government roles, 9% in education and trade, 7% in healthcare and 6% in manufacturing (gov.kz, 2024⁸).

Interviews with stakeholders reveal barriers for PwD in the workforce. Physical barriers, such as limited accessibility in urban infrastructure, remain a primary obstacle. Despite the continuous efforts and the existing measures for workplace adaptation, many workplaces are not equipped to accommodate PwD.

Educational barriers also persist, as many PwD lack higher education or vocational skills, which restricts them to lower-paying positions. Societal stigma is another challenge, as employers often doubt the competence of PwD, which affects hiring and retention, especially for individuals with severe or visible disabilities.

At the same time, PwD face individual challenges. Limited access to quality education and vocational training reduces their competitiveness in the labour market, while psychological barriers are significant, as many fear that entering formal employment could lead to the loss of disability status or benefits.

⁶ World Bank, Document on Project P179838, [online]. Last accessed 2 November 2024 at:

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099030724012521561/pdf/P17983812e207b06a188db1b5af589b895f.pdf>.

⁷ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Press News, [online]. Last accessed 3 November 2024 at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/press/news/details/877931?lang=ru>.

2. STRATEGIC AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Institutional framework

The primary institution responsible for overseeing policies and programmes for PwD in Kazakhstan is the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The ministry plays a central role in shaping and implementing the regulatory, financial and strategic framework for PwD. It manages policies related to employment, social benefits and support services. Within this framework, the ministry coordinates the efforts of other key governmental bodies to ensure that PwD are supported in various aspects of public life.

Recently, several new initiatives have been introduced to further strengthen inclusive employment in Kazakhstan. Within the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, a dedicated Department of Inclusion has been established to enhance policy coordination. In Almaty, a job-coaching institute is under development, and in August 2025 a pilot training programme was launched, with 10 labour-mobility staff trained as job coaches. This marks the beginning of piloting job coaching as a tool for supporting the employment of PwD. In addition, PwD themselves are increasingly creating jobs as social entrepreneurs, while non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are expanding their role in providing inclusive employment opportunities.

In addition to the Ministry of Labour, several other ministries play essential roles in promoting the situation of PwD. The Ministry of Health addresses healthcare needs, including rehabilitation services, while the Ministry of Education oversees inclusive education initiatives and vocational training programmes. The Ministry of Culture supports social-inclusion programmes to integrate PwD into community life. Together, these ministries collaborate under the National Human Rights Action Plan to enhance the employment and social inclusion of PwD.

At the regional level in Kazakhstan, Employment Coordination and Social Programs Offices are responsible for implementing employment policies and social programmes in their respective regions. At the district level, labour-mobility centres and career centres ensure localised delivery of services aimed at addressing employment challenges and promoting workforce integration.

In accordance with the Social Code, which came into effect on 1 July 2023, mobility centres operate in regional centres and the cities of Astana, Almaty and Shymkent. These centres play a critical role in analysing and forecasting regional labour market demands, providing information on employment trends and managing career centres. By working through career centres, they offer services to both employers and job seekers, bridging gaps in the labour market and facilitating smoother employment pathways.

As of 2024, there are 20 mobility centres and 207 career centres across Kazakhstan, located in various districts and cities. These centres are integral to implementing skills-activation policies, aimed at reducing the risk of long-term unemployment and supporting economic recovery. They provide essential services such as job matching, career guidance and access to training programmes. Their efforts are particularly focused on enhancing employability for vulnerable populations, including PwD, by offering tailored support and opportunities (enbek.kz, 2024⁸).

To support national and regional authorities, a role of advisors was established. Advisors to national and regional institutions play a role in shaping policies on inclusiveness and accessibility. Typically, experts in disability rights, employment, and social inclusion provide strategic guidance to governmental bodies at both levels. Their responsibilities include policy recommendations, oversight of

⁸ Enbek.kz, Employment Services, [online]. Last accessed 1 November 2024 at: <https://www.enbek.kz/ru/employment-services/czn>.

programme implementation and ensuring that the voices of persons with disabilities are represented in decision-making.

Collaborating closely with the Ministry of Labour and local administrative bodies (Akimats), these advisors refine frameworks for accessibility, workforce integration and social services, ensuring alignment with international best practices and human rights standards.

Kazakhstan has further strengthened this role through a UNDP-backed initiative launched in 2021. Currently, 13 regional akims, 4 ministers, and other officials have appointed advisors to promote inclusivity and accessibility. These advisors act as vital intermediaries between the government and PwD, advocating for equal access to services and infrastructure⁹.

Local government bodies ensure the implementation of disability rights laws. They are delegated with the responsibility to oversee accessibility of the infrastructure and monitor compliance with employment quotas for PwD in their respective regions.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also instrumental in improving the employment and social integration of PwD in Kazakhstan. NGOs such as ITeachMe and TEN QOGAM provide vocational training, information technology (IT) skills development and advocacy, bridging the gap between government efforts and the specific needs of PwD.

2.2 Coordination and cooperation mechanisms

Kazakhstan's policy framework includes several mechanisms for coordination and cooperation among the diverse stakeholders supporting PwD. The Coordinating Council on Persons with Disabilities, established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, fosters collaboration among government agencies, NGOs and stakeholders, including representatives from public and private sectors and PwD communities. It ensures compliance with international commitments like the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and supports the development of policies and laws that protect PwD. The council monitors national programmes, provides recommendations for improvement and addresses barriers in infrastructure, education, healthcare and employment to promote social and economic inclusion in Kazakhstan (gov.kz, 2023¹⁰). Establishment of the Coordinating Council is considered a positive step towards better cooperation between the government and NGO sector in the area of PwD employment support.

Additionally, public councils under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection serve as platforms for dialogue, where various stakeholders, including PwD advocates and NGOs, can raise concerns, discuss policies and influence decision-making processes. Their primary roles include providing policy consultation, ensuring public oversight, advocating for marginalised groups and facilitating collaboration between civil society and government. While their effectiveness varies, public councils play an essential role in promoting inclusive governance and addressing the needs of diverse social groups (Knox & Janenova, 2017¹¹).

2.3 Legislative framework

Kazakhstan's legislative framework for PwD is grounded in anti-discrimination principles and mandates inclusivity across various sectors. The Social Code, enacted in 2023, is a cornerstone of

⁹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kazakhstan, Inclusion and Accessibility: A Path to a Progressive Society, [online]. Last accessed 30 October 2024 at: <https://www.undp.org/kazakhstan/stories/inclusion-and-accessibility-path-progressive-society>.

¹⁰ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Document, [online]. Last accessed 2 November 2024 at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/documents/details/531865?lang=ru>.

¹¹ Nazarbayev University Repository, Academic Publication, [online]. Last accessed 3 November 2024 at: <https://nur.nu.edu.kz/server/api/core/bitstreams/65b0f1a7-9127-4a5d-b50e-7b55693955b9/content>.

this framework. It prohibits discrimination based on disability and establishes regulations that require employers to provide reasonable accommodations in the workplace. The code ensures that PwD have equal access to employment opportunities and social services and reinforces the need for accessible public infrastructure (primeminister.kz, 2023¹²).

In Kazakhstan, the legislative framework supporting the employment of persons with disabilities is primarily established by the Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities and the Labour Code. These laws mandate that local executive bodies, known as Akimats, set employment quotas for PwD, typically ranging from 2% to 4% of the total workforce, depending on the organisation's size and excluding high-risk sectors. The laws also regulate incentives for employers, such as subsidies to workplace adaptation and wages, microcredits and grants for start-ups established by PwD, as well as the Centre for Labour Mobility.

The Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities outlines the state's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for PwD, emphasising social protection, rehabilitation and integration into society. It mandates the establishment of employment quotas and encourages the creation of special and social jobs tailored for PwD. Additionally, the law provides for vocational training and retraining programmes to enhance the employability of PwD. (adilet.zan.kz)

The Labour Code reinforces these provisions by prohibiting discrimination in the labour sphere and upholding the right of every individual to freely choose their work. It ensures that PwD have equal rights in employment, including access to vocational training, career advancement, and safe working conditions. The code also stipulates that employers must provide reasonable accommodations to PwD to create favourable working conditions. (adilet.zan.kz).

Additional regulations protect PwD from dismissal solely based on their disability status, enhancing job security and promoting retention in the workforce. Accessibility standards are also mandated, covering public buildings, transportation and work environments, to ensure that PwD can participate fully in society. Although these legislative measures represent progress, challenges remain in their enforcement, especially in rural areas where resources for workplace adaptations and accessible infrastructure may be limited.

In January 2025, Kazakhstan ratified the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled. The treaty introduces copyright exceptions that allow libraries, specialised organisations and educational institutions to produce and share accessible-format materials, including Braille, audiobooks and electronic texts, without prior authorisation from copyright holders. It is expected to expand opportunities for education, employment and cultural participation for blind and visually impaired people in Kazakhstan¹³.

2.4 Strategic framework

Kazakhstan has adopted several strategic initiatives to support the inclusion and empowerment of PwD. The National Development Plan until 2025¹⁴ and the Social Development Concept until 2030¹⁵ are two overarching frameworks that include specific goals related to PwD. These plans aim to

¹² Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Pensions, Benefits, and Social Support: New Social Code Enters into Force on July 1 in Kazakhstan, [online]. Last accessed 1 November 2024 at: <https://primeminister.kz/en/news/pensions-benefits-proactive-provision-of-social-support-new-social-code-enters-into-force-on-july-1-in-kazakhstan-24545>.

¹³ World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Marrakesh Notification No. 102 [online]. Last accessed 18 September 2025 at: https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/treaties/notifications/details/treaty_marrakesh_102.

¹⁴ Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan's National Development Plan: Social Well-being, Strong Economy, and Accessible Healthcare, [online]. Last accessed 1 November 2024 at: <https://primeminister.kz/en/news/kazakhstan-damuyynyn-ulttyk-zhospary-aleumettik-al-aukat-mykty-ekonomika-zhane-kolzhetimdi-densaulyk-sakta-1725726>.

¹⁵ Presidency of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Akorda), Strategies and Programs, [online]. Last accessed 2 November 2024 at: https://www.akorda.kz/en/official_documents/strategies_and_programs.

promote social inclusion, improve healthcare and education access, and enhance economic opportunities for vulnerable groups, including PwD.

The Concept of Inclusive Policy until 2030 is a comprehensive strategy currently under development, aimed specifically at increasing employment rates among PwD and ensuring workplace accessibility. This policy framework reflects Kazakhstan's commitment to aligning with international standards, particularly the UNCRPD, and focuses on expanding employment support services, improving accessible infrastructure and addressing the unique needs of PwD in the labour market.

The National Plan for Ensuring Rights and Improving the Quality of Life of Persons with Disabilities until 2025 is a targeted initiative that focuses on seven key areas: disability prevention, access to education, a barrier-free environment, employment, rehabilitation services, social support and modernisation of public awareness. This plan emphasises increasing PwD employment rates, expanding rehabilitation services and leveraging digital solutions such as the aleumet.egov.kz¹⁶ portal to streamline accessibility. It also aims to increase the employment rate of PwD to 30% by 2025 and strengthen TEN QOGAM Social Support and Employment Centres across all regions¹⁷.

2.5 Sources of financing

The financing of policies supporting the employment of PwD in Kazakhstan comes from a combination of government budgets, dedicated funds, grants and subsidies. The primary source of funding is the state budget, allocated through the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. This funding supports various employment initiatives, including workplace adaptation subsidies, wage support for employers hiring PwD and grants for entrepreneurship.

Unfortunately, there is no publicly available official information on the detailed budget allocation and expenditures specifically for the financing of policies supporting the employment of PwD in Kazakhstan.

¹⁶ eGov Kazakhstan – Aleumet, Social Services Portal, [online]. Last accessed 3 November 2024 at: <https://aleumet.egov.kz/>.

¹⁷ Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Implementation of the National Plan to Ensure the Rights and Improve the Quality of Life of People with Disabilities in Kazakhstan until 2025, [online]. Last accessed 31 October 2024 at: <https://primeminister.kz/en/news/kazakstanda-mugedek-zhandardyn-kukygyn-kamtamasyz-etu-zhane-omir-suru-sapasyn-zhaksartu-zhonindegi-2025-zhylga-deyingi-ulttyk-zhospar-iske-asyryluda-b-nurymbetov-2114836>.

3. POLICIES SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Kazakhstan has implemented several policies and programmes to support the employability of PwD. These initiatives range from direct services to targeted measures aimed at improving employment prospects, skill development and accessibility within the labour market. While progress has been made, there are still areas for improvement, particularly in increasing accessibility, awareness and service usage among PwD.

3.1 Services supporting the employability of persons with disabilities

Kazakhstan offers various services aimed at increasing the employability of PwD. As of 1 October 2024, more than 20 700 persons with disabilities were covered in 2024 by various employment assistance measures (gov.kz, 2024a¹⁸). These services include information provision, job matching and counselling. Enbek.kz, the national employment portal, is a central platform for job matching and includes features tailored to PwD. Employers can use the platform to post accessible job listings, which are categorised separately to help PwD find suitable employment opportunities. However, the presence of a special category labelled 'jobs for PwD,' while intended to facilitate matching, may inadvertently reinforce segregation by limiting PwD to a narrow range of designated vacancies instead of ensuring equal access to the broader labour market.

Despite the availability of these services, their overall effectiveness remains limited. Possible reasons for the low effectiveness of these services include limited awareness among people with disabilities and employers about the features of the Enbek.kz platform, social stereotypes among employers (such as the perception that workplace adaptation is overly complex or costly), low digital literacy among PwD and a lack of mechanisms to gather and act on user feedback for improving the service.

The government provides job-matching services for PwD through regional employment centres and the online platform Enbek.kz. These centres also lack specialised counsellors trained to address the unique employment needs of PwD, which further reduces the effectiveness of job-matching efforts.

By early 2025, more than 19 000 PwD had approached career centres. Out of these, 5 600 secured employment, including 4 400 in subsidised workplaces and 1 200 in permanent jobs.

The Enbek.kz platform, while intended as the main national employment portal, remains largely inaccessible for PwD, and many of the online training courses are not adapted to different types of disabilities.

Counselling services are available, though coverage is limited, especially in rural areas. Some NGOs, like ITeachMe, have developed specialised counselling and vocational guidance programmes tailored to the unique needs of PwD. ITeachMe provides guidance on career options, skill requirements and pathways for further training. However, the scale of coverage remains limited, and financial support for expanding these programmes is necessary.

There is a general lack of dedicated services targeted specifically at PwD within the broader unemployment support system. This results in underrepresentation of PwD in employment services. Financial data on the budget allocated specifically for PwD support services is sparse, making it challenging to assess the exact financial scope and scale of these services.

¹⁸ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Press News, [online]. Last accessed 1 November 2024 at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/press/news/details/873726?lang=ru>.

3.2 Measures supporting the employability of persons with disabilities

Kazakhstan has a range of measures to support the employability of PwD. These include training programmes, supported and subsidised employment, and wage support initiatives. These measures aim to increase skills, create accessible jobs and provide financial incentives for employers to hire PwD. However, most of employment programmes target the general population rather than being specifically designed for persons with disabilities. Although, some of these initiatives may include PwD as part of their broader focus on vulnerable groups.

Training and skill development programmes: There are various programmes in Kazakhstan aimed at developing the skills of PwD. The National Entrepreneurship Development Project offers short-term training and on-the-job experience. PwD can benefit from the programme. In 2023, the project engaged approximately 34.895 PwD, with over 10.000 obtaining permanent employment.

The Atlas of Professions for persons with disabilities exists as a reference tool but is rarely used in practice and has not been regularly updated. To ensure its relevance, the Atlas should be revised and modernised, reflecting current labour market needs, new occupations and inclusive career pathways for PwD.

Another programme, Bastau Business, supports entrepreneurship by providing grants for the realisation of innovative business ideas available to all eligible participants, including PwD. These initiatives are overseen by Public Employment Services (PES) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, ensuring they align with national employment strategies and are accessible to PwD across all regions.

Vocational Rehabilitation Centres: The Vocational Rehabilitation Centre in Astana and TEN QOGAM Social Support Centres, operating in multiple urban areas (Almaty, Shymkent, Karaganda, Temirtau), offer tailored programmes to prepare PwD for employment. These centres provide professional training, social integration activities and job placement services. The centres aim to enhance the employability of PwD by helping them gain skills that align with labour market needs. However, coverage remains limited to urban areas, with fewer services accessible to PwD in rural locations. TEN QOGAM Social Support Centres focus on a holistic approach to rehabilitation, combining skill development with psychological and social support. They also offer career counselling, mentorship programmes and entrepreneurship guidance, including grants for PwD who wish to start their own businesses. These centres operate under the guidance and financial support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

While TEN QOGAM centres were initially designed to play a role in employment support for persons with disabilities, over time their focus has shifted more toward promoting social inclusion, leisure activities and community engagement. In 2022, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection requested analytical support from the World Bank to develop a comprehensive plan to reform its labour market for the 2024-2030 period. Based on discussions between the ministry and the World Bank, a roadmap has been prepared, followed by a set of analytical materials by the World Bank. The report of this project stated that the skills development system must ensure that every child has an opportunity to learn, including children with special needs¹⁹.

Examples of good practices:

- The First Job Program in Kazakhstan, implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, provides wage subsidies to employers hiring young persons, including those with disabilities. The programme aims to enhance employability by offering initial work experience,

¹⁹ Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC-Hub), [online]. Last accessed 10 September 2025 at: <https://conflictsensitivityhub.net/>.

supporting the integration of young PwD into the labour market as part of the country's national employment strategies.

- In January 2016, Samruk-Kazyna Trust was established as the Samruk-Kazyna group's single charity operator. It implements charitable projects addressing socially significant issues in cooperation with state bodies, the Government of Kazakhstan and social policy experts. One of its priority areas is the development of human potential and labour relations. In this context, the foundation supports inclusive initiatives for persons with disabilities, including OrleTECH, implemented with Shell and the ITeachMe Foundation. The project focuses on digital skills training and employment, contributing to the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities in Kazakhstan²⁰.
- ITeachMe offers tailored IT and remote work training programmes, enabling PwD to work in fields less reliant on physical presence, such as digital marketing and programming. ITeachMe's programmes focus on digital skills development, providing training and certifications in IT skills. The programme has seen successful integration of PwD into remote work positions, addressing mobility barriers.

3.3 Enhancing the capacity of main stakeholders

The capacity of stakeholders, including Public Employment Services (PES), NGOs and national authorities, plays a critical role in the effectiveness of services and measures aimed at supporting employability of persons with disabilities. Kazakhstan has taken some steps to enhance stakeholder capacity, though there remains significant room for improvement.

Public Employment Services lacks specialised personnel trained in supporting PwD. Capacity-building initiatives, such as training PES staff on inclusivity standards and counselling PwD, would improve service delivery. Currently, the PES in Kazakhstan has limited experience in dealing with the unique needs of PwD, resulting in challenges in delivering effective and empathetic services to this group.

Non-governmental organisations: The NGO ITeachMe and a government-supported initiative TEN QOGAM are instrumental in providing specialised services for PwD, particularly in the fields of vocational training and employment support. These organisations often have greater flexibility and expertise in addressing PwD's unique needs. However, NGOs frequently struggle with limited funding and human resources, constraining their ability to expand services to more regions. Increased government funding for NGOs would enhance their capacity to deliver inclusive training and employment services.

National authorities: The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and other national authorities have begun collaborating with NGOs and the private sector to develop inclusive employment standards and policies. Initiatives like the Inclusive Policy Concept aim to institutionalise inclusivity in the labour market. However, further efforts to train government staff on the importance of inclusivity and accessibility standards are needed to foster a supportive regulatory environment.

Examples of capacity-building initiatives include regular training sessions and workshops organised by the Coordinating Council on Persons with Disabilities for government and NGO representatives on inclusive policies and employment strategies. In addition, Samruk Kazyna, in cooperation with local NGOs, has delivered workshops for employers focusing on workplace adaptation and inclusive recruitment.

To further enhance stakeholder capacity, Kazakhstan could implement specialised training programmes for PES staff, increase funding for NGOs and establish a framework for ongoing collaboration between government agencies, NGOs and the private sector. An emphasis on building

²⁰ Samruk-Kazyna Trust, About Us, [online]. Last accessed 2 November 2024 at: <https://sk-trust.kz/about>.

technical expertise within these organisations would also facilitate the development of inclusive policies and effective employment support services.

In summary, while Kazakhstan has implemented several supportive policies and programmes aimed at increasing the employability of PwD, challenges remain in service delivery, accessibility and stakeholder capacity. Addressing these issues through enhanced coordination, capacity-building and targeted funding will strengthen the impact of these initiatives and improve employment outcomes for PwD.

4. POLICIES SUPPORTING DEMAND FOR EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Kazakhstan has implemented several policies and instruments aimed at encouraging employers to hire PwD. These policies focus on creating demand in the labour market for PwD by providing quotas, tax incentives, financial support and informational campaigns.

Quota systems: The government mandates a quota system that requires employers to allocate 2% to 4% of their workforce to PwD, depending on the size and sector of the organisation. This system applies primarily to medium and large enterprises, though compliance varies across regions. Typically, the quota percentage depends on the number of employees on the payroll: 50 to 100 employees – 2%, 101 to 250 employees – 3%, more than 251 employees – 4%. **However, enforcement and monitoring of the quota system remain inconsistent.** Interviewers noted that only a portion of employers comply with the quota and those who do are often motivated by government subsidies. However, data on the number of employers filling the quotas is missing. Also, there is a lack of research on the impact of quota mechanism on employment of persons with disabilities.

Local executive bodies are tasked with establishing employment quotas for PwD. Compliance with these quotas is monitored by the Department of the State Labor Inspection Committee under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. Non-compliance by employers can result in financial penalties.

However, the methodology for calculating these quotas is not transparent and is often perceived as underestimated. Since quotas are set by local executive bodies (Akimats), practices vary across regions. Work is currently underway to revise the relevant legislative acts in order to bring greater clarity, fairness and consistency to the quota system.

In parallel, Kazakhstan's legal and policy framework currently **lack supported employment**, though its formal introduction is considered. The instrument could provide workplace assistance and integration support for PwD who require more intensive guidance.

A further critical gap concerns persons with mental disabilities, who remain largely excluded from the labour market and are insufficiently targeted by current employment programmes and policies.

Direct financing instruments: The government offers financial assistance to employers hiring PwD, primarily in the form of subsidies and grants. Subsidies cover up to 70% of the costs associated with adapting workplaces for PwD. Employers can also receive subsidies covering up to 70% of wages for PwD in the first year, with this support gradually reducing over a three-year period to 60%. While these programmes have shown promise, they are limited in scale and primarily reach urban areas, leaving rural employers with fewer resources.

Workplace subsidies have limited relevance as they only cover predefined items, which may not meet the real needs of people with disabilities or employers. Planned reforms will make subsidies more flexible by directly supporting employers' requests for specific adaptations for employees with disabilities.

Tax incentives: Employers can reduce taxable income by twice the expenses for remunerating persons with disabilities and 50% of calculated social tax on their salary and other payments.

Information and promotion measures: Kazakhstan has been conducting information campaigns to educate employers on the benefits of hiring PwD and inform them about available support programmes. Organisations such as skills.enbek.kz serve as hubs for job listings and resources, helping employers connect with qualified PwD. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns is hampered by persistent social stigmas and a lack of widespread awareness about PwD employment initiatives.

Support for startups and social enterprises: Kazakhstan also supports startups and social enterprises, including those led by or benefiting PwD. Programmes like Bastau Business offer entrepreneurship training and grants to aspiring business owners, including PwD. The National Entrepreneurship Development Project provides short-term training and work experience to improve employability for PwD. Additionally, the state provides grants and microloans to support PwD interested in self-employment or establishing social enterprises. State grants of up to 1.4 million tenge are provided to socially vulnerable citizens for starting their own businesses. To date, this support has been extended to 1 470 PwD (gov.kz, 2024a²¹).

Kazakhstan has also introduced a register of social entrepreneurs. Organisations included in this register demonstrate social impact, for example by employing PwD, and are eligible for various state incentives, which differ across regions. These may include tax reductions, access to grants, or participation in state social procurement programmes. Companies where at least 51% of employees are PwD qualify for social procurement contracts, while employers who hire PwD benefit from a reduced corporate income tax (CIT) rate.

Despite the existence of various support instruments, several challenges remain. These include ensuring sustainable funding, expanding direct financial assistance to rural areas, and strengthening the monitoring and tracking of programme effectiveness to improve outcomes. In addition, employer awareness of available support programmes remains low, which limits their uptake. Employers also continue to express concerns about the potential costs and practical challenges associated with employing persons with disabilities.

Another gap is the limited availability of specialised services for employers, such as guidance and counselling on recruitment, reasonable accommodation, and the management of inclusive teams. Finally, administrative procedures for accessing grants and subsidies are often complex and discouraging.

²¹ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Press News, [online]. Last accessed 5 November 2024 at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/press/news/details/873726?lang=ru>.

5. THE LINKAGES BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER POLICY AREAS

Kazakhstan's policies supporting PwD intersect with various other policy areas, such as education, social benefits, healthcare and accessibility. These intersections influence the employment outcomes of PwD, both positively and negatively.

5.1 From school to the labour market

The transition from school to the labour market is challenging for young PwD in Kazakhstan. Educational policies promote inclusivity, but limited physical accessibility and a lack of trained faculty in schools and universities hinder the effective integration of PwD. Career counselling, vocational training and internships for young PwD are essential but remain limited in scope. Moreover, comprehensive data on the employment rates of young PwD and the transition from school to the labour market is not readily available.

Key challenges in the transition process include a lack of accessible educational infrastructure and insufficient career guidance tailored to PwD. Some NGOs offer support programmes, however these services do not cover all regions. Without sufficient support during this transition phase, PwD often enter the labour market with limited skills and experience, which negatively impacts their employability.

There is also a lack of vocational guidance and professional orientation tools specifically adapted for PwD. No standardised aptitude or career tests exist to support PwD in identifying suitable career paths. In higher education, challenges begin already at the entry level: many PwD are unable to access quality secondary education, meaning that higher education quotas remain largely unused. Even when PwD do enter universities, they are often exempted from practical training out of pity, which leaves them less prepared for the labour market.

In response to these challenges, initiatives like the **First Job** programme have been introduced to support youth employment in Kazakhstan. This programme targets individuals aged 18 and older, with priority given to youth within three years of completing school (ages 18-29), youth without parents (ages 18-29), people with disabilities and women living in challenging circumstances. The programme aims to provide these groups with their initial work experience, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the labour market²².

Additionally, organisations such as the ITeachMe Competence Development Centre offer professional development opportunities to young PwD, focusing on IT and other relevant fields. These programmes aim to make participants more competitive in the labour market and promote financial independence²³.

Despite these efforts, there is a need for more comprehensive and widespread programmes to facilitate the transition of young PwD from education to employment. Enhancing accessible educational infrastructure, providing tailored career guidance and expanding vocational training opportunities are essential steps toward improving the employability of young PwD in Kazakhstan.

²² Job Guarantee Program, Employment Roadmap, [online]. Last accessed 4 November 2024 at: <https://www.jobguarantee.org/global-program-map/>.

²³ United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Central Asia, Professional Development Training for People with Disabilities in Kazakhstan, [online]. Last accessed 3 November 2024 at: <https://www.usaid.gov/>.

5.2 Skills development opportunities

Kazakhstan offers career guidance and adult education services for PwD, primarily through NGOs and public employment centres. Programmes such as skills.enbek.kz provide online courses accessible to PwD, helping them gain relevant skills for the labour market. Since the beginning of 2024, 103 100 citizens, including approximately 50 100 unemployed individuals, have received certificates for completing online courses on the Skills Enbek vocational training platform (hereinafter referred to as the Platform). As of 2024, a total of 491 800 Kazakhstanis have registered on the Platform, with 130 400 new registrations occurring this year²⁴.

However, these opportunities are often limited in scale, and PwD, especially in rural areas, may have limited access to skill development programmes.

Key challenges in skills development include the lack of accessible courses for people with different types of disabilities and limited outreach in rural areas. Additionally, many PwD require ongoing support to build both technical and social skills necessary for workplace integration. Expanding access to skill development programmes and including courses on soft skills and financial literacy would address some of these gaps.

5.3 How social benefits support the employment of persons with disabilities

Kazakhstan's social benefits system includes pensions and social support programmes for PwD. While these benefits provide financial stability, they may unintentionally discourage employment for some individuals, as many PwD remain afraid that formal employment could lead to a loss or reduction of benefits. Although this risk is not supported by legislation, it discourages PwD from seeking work. Under the new Social Code (2023), the government has introduced policies allowing PwD to retain disability pensions even when employed, aiming to address these concerns.

Challenges in this area include balancing benefits with incentives to work. Policies that encourage part-time or flexible employment without risking the loss of benefits could make employment more attractive to PwD. More targeted policies that integrate social benefits with employment support would help address these challenges.

5.4 Access to social services

Access to social services, such as healthcare, rehabilitation, transportation and personal assistance, is vital for PwD to achieve independence and engage in the labour market. In Kazakhstan, these services are available but often limited by regional disparities. Urban areas have more comprehensive services, while rural areas face shortages, particularly in transportation and healthcare access.

Limited access to these services reduces PwD's ability to maintain stable employment, especially when health issues or mobility constraints require reliable assistance. Expanding access to social services and ensuring consistent support across regions would improve employment outcomes for PwD by removing barriers that hinder their participation in the workforce.

²⁴ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Press News, [online]. Last accessed 3 November 2024 at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/press/news/details/896491?lang=ru>.

5.5 Accessibility

Kazakhstan has taken steps to improve accessibility in the labour market, but significant challenges remain. Accessibility policies address both physical and informational barriers, with standards for accessible workplaces, public services and transportation systems. Increasing the accessibility of workplaces, public transport and digital tools is essential for PwD to access and retain employment. Government initiatives such as funding for workplace adaptations and the development of accessible public transport are a good example, however their scope is still insufficient. Therefore, compliance with accessibility standards varies, particularly in older infrastructure and rural regions.

Kazakhstan's Interactive Accessibility Map is a digital platform designed to assess and promote the accessibility of various facilities for persons with disabilities. As of November 2024, 43.312 facilities have been registered on the Interactive Accessibility Map, of which only 19.421 facilities, or 45%, are fully adapted for accessibility. More recent data shows that in 2025 64% facilities were fully accessible and the plan for 2026 is reach 80%²⁵. Regionally, six areas in Kazakhstan have fallen below the planned targets. During first ten months of 2024, social inspectors conducted 2.344 inspections to evaluate accessibility for PwD in social and transportation infrastructure. These inspections resulted in 826 orders to address identified violations and 798 administrative fines totalling 199.2 million Kazakhstani Tenge (KZT) being imposed (gov.kz, 2024²⁶).

In addition to the government's initiative, a **civil society project called Accessible Kazakhstan** (dskaz.kz) has been developed **to provide detailed information on the accessibility of various facilities**. This platform allows users to assess and rate the accessibility of public spaces, such as stores, pharmacies, cafes and government buildings, using a traffic light system: green for accessible, yellow for partially accessible and red for inaccessible. Users can view photos and descriptions of facilities to determine their suitability. The project has expanded to include 40 cities across Kazakhstan and has been recognised as the first Digital Public Good in Central Asia²⁷.

5.6 Gender dimension of policies supporting employment of persons with disabilities

In Kazakhstan, there are no significant gender-related challenges specific to the employment of persons with disabilities. Current policies and programmes supporting employment for persons with disabilities are designed to be inclusive of all genders, without specific discrimination or barriers affecting men or women differently. Both male and female persons with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities, government support programmes and vocational training initiatives.

The absence of gender-specific obstacles in these frameworks suggests that existing policies effectively address the needs of persons with disabilities regardless of gender. Consequently, no additional gender-related challenges have been identified within the scope of employment support measures for persons with disabilities.

²⁵ Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Press news, online. Last accessed 23.04.2026

<https://primeminister.kz/en/news/network-of-rehabilitation-centers-and-accessibility-being-expanded-in-kazakhstan-31293>.

²⁶ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Press News, [online]. Last accessed 1 November 2024 at: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/enbek/press/news/details/877931?lang=ru>.

²⁷ UNICEF Kazakhstan, Paving an Accessible Path to the Future, [online]. Last accessed 1 November 2024 at: <https://www.unicef.org/kazakhstan/en/stories/paving-accessible-path-future>.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Kazakhstan has made substantial progress in building a legal, strategic and institutional framework to support the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The country has aligned its legislation with international standards, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and has strengthened its policy framework through the Social Code, anti-discrimination provisions, national strategies, and dedicated coordination mechanisms. The establishment of the Coordinating Council on Persons with Disabilities, the expansion of mobility and career centres, the growing role of NGOs, and the recent piloting of job coaching all indicate clear political commitment and a stronger institutional basis for inclusive employment policy.

At the same time, implementation still lags behind policy ambition. The evidence base remains weak: employment data for persons with disabilities are incomplete, especially for some disability groups, while public information on financing, programme coverage and results is limited. This constrains policy evaluation and makes it difficult to assess what works. Although persons with disabilities can access mainstream employment measures, the overall scope of specialised and tailored services remains insufficient. Public employment services still have limited specialist capacity, the territorial coverage of services is uneven, especially between urban and rural areas, and awareness and accessibility of key tools such as Enbek.kz and online training offers remain limited.

The note also shows that Kazakhstan has not yet fully moved from a placement-based approach towards a fully rights-based and inclusive employment model. The continued emphasis on jobs or professions considered “appropriate” for persons with disabilities, reflected in tools such as the dedicated vacancy categories on Enbek.kz and the Atlas of Professions, risks reinforcing segregation and concentrating persons with disabilities in lower-skilled jobs. A more inclusive approach would place greater emphasis on reasonable accommodation, workplace adaptation and access to the open labour market. This gap is also visible in the still limited development of supported employment and in the insufficient attention given to persons with mental disabilities within current labour market measures.

Measures aimed at employers provide an important foundation, but they remain too weak to drive broad-based change. Employment quotas, wage subsidies, workplace adaptation support, tax incentives and entrepreneurship measures are in place, yet enforcement is uneven, administrative procedures are often burdensome, and employer awareness of available support remains low. Employers also have limited access to specialised services such as guidance on inclusive recruitment, reasonable accommodation and the management of inclusive teams. Persistent stereotypes continue to reduce demand for workers with disabilities, as many employers still underestimate their capacities or overestimate the costs of adaptation.

Finally, labour market inclusion is still constrained by barriers beyond employment policy itself. Persons with disabilities continue to face obstacles in access to quality education, vocational guidance, higher education, skills development, transport, rehabilitation, social services and accessible infrastructure, all of which shape their employment opportunities. The school-to-work transition remains weak, especially for young people with disabilities, and fears about losing benefits may still discourage some individuals from entering formal employment, even where legislation has become more supportive. No major gender-specific barriers were identified in the note, but better disaggregated data would be needed to monitor this more robustly. Overall, Kazakhstan has created a solid policy foundation, but stronger implementation, better data, more specialised support, greater accessibility, and closer coordination across employment, education, social protection and accessibility policies are still needed to translate commitments into sustained labour market inclusion.

6.2 Best practices

One of the standout practices in Kazakhstan is the TEN QOGAM Social Support Centres, which provide a range of services to assist PwD in finding employment, developing skills and accessing necessary resources. These centres represent a model of integrated support, combining vocational training, job matching and rehabilitation services under one roof, thereby addressing multiple needs of PwD in a single accessible location.

Another notable best practice is ITeachMe's digital skills training programmes, which equip PwD with valuable IT skills, enabling them to work remotely in flexible, accessible environments. This approach has proven successful, particularly for individuals with severe mobility impairments and highlights the potential of the IT sector in offering inclusive employment opportunities.

Kazakhstan's collaboration with NGOs also sets a strong example. Through partnerships with organisations like ITeachMe, Clubhouse Alrami and TEN QOGAM Social Support Centres, the government is able to reach a wider population and offer specialised programmes that meet the unique needs of PwD. These partnerships allow for innovative pilot programmes, such as flexible employment standards developed by NGOs, which are periodically adapted to the needs of both employers and PwD.

6.3 Recommendations

1. Strengthen data collection, monitoring and policy evaluation

Kazakhstan should improve the collection and publication of data on persons with disabilities in the labour market. This should include better information on employment outcomes, programme coverage, financing and results. A stronger evidence base would support better policy design, monitoring and reform.

2. Expand specialised employment support services for persons with disabilities

Kazakhstan should complement mainstream employment measures with more specialised support for persons with disabilities. This should include accessible career guidance, job matching, counselling and tailored support through public employment services and local delivery structures. Particular attention should be given to improving coverage in rural areas.

3. Promote a more rights-based and inclusive employment approach

Employment policy should move further away from approaches that direct persons with disabilities into a narrow set of jobs considered suitable for them. Instead, policy should focus on equal access to the open labour market, reasonable accommodation, workplace adaptation and individual support. This would bring implementation more closely in line with the country's legal and strategic commitments.

4. Strengthen support for employers and improve implementation of incentives

Kazakhstan should strengthen the instruments that encourage employers to hire and retain persons with disabilities. This includes better enforcement of employment quotas, simpler access to grants and subsidies, wider territorial coverage of support, and more practical services for employers on recruitment, accommodation and inclusive workforce management. Support measures should be easier to access and better aligned with employers' needs.

5. Tackle stereotypes and strengthen protection against discrimination

Kazakhstan should reinforce measures that address negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the labour market. This should combine stronger implementation of anti-discrimination rules with awareness-raising for employers and the wider public. The aim should be to shift attention from perceived limitations to skills, performance and inclusion.

6. Improve accessibility in workplaces, transport, public services and digital tools

Accessibility should remain a core policy priority. Kazakhstan should continue strengthening the enforcement of accessibility standards and extend efforts beyond physical infrastructure to include transport, digital services, employment platforms and training tools. Better accessibility would reduce barriers to both employment and wider social participation.

7. Strengthen the link between employment policy, education and skills development

Kazakhstan should improve the transition from school to work for persons with disabilities and expand access to inclusive education, vocational education and lifelong learning. Policy should focus on removing barriers in higher education, improving vocational guidance, and ensuring that training opportunities are accessible and relevant to labour market demand.

8. Better connect employment support with social protection and social services

Employment policy should be more closely coordinated with social benefits, rehabilitation, transport and personal support services. Clear rules and communication are needed so that persons with disabilities are not discouraged from taking up work because of fears about losing benefits. Better coordination across these areas would help reduce structural barriers to labour market participation.

9. Develop more targeted support for groups facing greater barriers

Kazakhstan should introduce more focused measures for groups that are less well served by existing policies, including persons with mental disabilities and those living outside major urban centres. This should include tailored employment support, adapted workplace assistance and stronger pathways into open employment.

10. Build on effective partnerships and scale up proven approaches

Kazakhstan should strengthen cooperation with NGOs and other service providers that already deliver practical results. Pilot approaches such as job coaching, targeted counselling and digital skills development should be assessed and, where effective, scaled up through stable partnerships and public funding. This would help expand specialised support and make better use of existing experience and innovation.

ANNEX

List of interviewees and organisations

The interviews were carried out with the following interviewees and organisations:

- Centre for Social Support for People with Disabilities 'TEN QOGAM'
- Clubhouse 'Alrami' for people with mental disorders
- Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kazakhstan 'QSamruk.kz'
- Akimat of the city of Almaty
- State Institution 'Centre for Labour Mobility of Almaty'
- Centre for Competence Development 'ITeachMe'
- State Institution 'Republican Library for Blind and Visually Impaired Citizens'

ACRONYMS

AB	Assignment Beneficiary
ALMM	Active Labour Market Measures
ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
DPO	Disability Persons Organisation
EC	European Commission
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GAP III	Gender Action Plan 2021-2025
IT	Information technology
KZT	Kazakhstani Tenge
MLSP	The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
MSs	Member States
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PCs	Partner Countries
PES	Public Employment Services
PwD	persons with disabilities
RK	Republic of Kazakhstan
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
YAP	Youth Action Plan

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