

SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS OF THE POPULATION

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**Annotation.** This article examines the theoretical and practical foundations of social protection and targeted support for vulnerable groups of the population in Uzbekistan. The study analyzes the objective necessity of state intervention in supporting socially disadvantaged segments of society within the framework of market transformation and economic reforms. Particular attention is paid to the evolution of the social protection system, the transition from generalized benefits to a targeted assistance mechanism, and the elimination of egalitarian redistribution practices. The paper systematizes the main forms of social protection, including pension provision, social assistance to low-income families, support for persons with disabilities, unemployed citizens, elderly individuals, and children left without parental care. The research highlights the role of legal, economic, and institutional mechanisms in ensuring a decent standard of living and preventing excessive social stratification.

The study concludes that the modern social protection model in Uzbekistan is characterized by differentiation, targeting, and the involvement of both state and non-state funding sources. Strengthening income regulation mechanisms and improving the efficiency of social transfers remain key priorities for sustainable social development and poverty reduction.

**Keywords:** social protection, vulnerable groups, targeted social assistance, poverty reduction, income regulation, social security system, unemployment benefits, pension provision, social stratification, state social policy.

**INTRODUCTION.** In the context of a modern market economy, support for vulnerable groups of the population represents one of the priority directions of state social policy. The process of economic reforms, changes in forms of ownership, structural transformations in the labor market, inflationary pressures, and increasing income differentiation have led to the emergence of socially vulnerable groups requiring systematic protection and assistance. Therefore, improving the social protection system and developing it on the basis of targeted support principles has become an objective necessity.

Vulnerable groups of the population include persons with disabilities, lonely elderly citizens, low-income families, unemployed individuals, and children left without parental care. Supporting these groups is essential not only for ensuring social justice but also for maintaining social stability, reducing poverty, and strengthening human capital development. During the transition to market relations, the primary task of the social protection system was to move away from generalized egalitarian redistribution mechanisms and to establish a targeted assistance model focused on specific individuals and families in real need. In this regard, particular attention has been paid to improving income regulation policies, pension provision, social benefits, subsidies, and the institutional framework for delivering social services.

In this context, the purpose of this article is to examine the theoretical foundations of social protection for vulnerable groups and to analyze the current social support mechanisms

implemented in Uzbekistan, assessing their effectiveness and identifying directions for further improvement.

**MAIN PART.** The state has an objective interest in supporting the most vulnerable segments of the population for several reasons:

- 1) a state that proclaims itself civilized in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is obligated to "ensure a decent standard of living for its population";
- 2) every state has an interest in expanding the production of a skilled labor force;
- 3) socioeconomic support for disadvantaged segments of the population stimulates the economic well-being of various groups and strata of the population, thereby reducing social tensions in society.

The period of the formation of market relations is characterized by a contradiction between the population's growing need for social protection and the shrinking capacity to meet it. By analyzing changes in the value of the population's monetary income and the price level of goods and services, we can identify the causes of increasing social tension: a decline in production in general and consumer goods in particular; an unfavorable demographic situation and, as a result, an aging society; structural changes in the economy and a reduction in the military, leading to rising unemployment; inflation and the devaluation of household savings; and rising energy costs, leading to rising utility and transportation costs, etc.

Life demands new economic approaches to strengthening social protection for citizens. It is necessary to create legal and economic conditions for:

- ensuring a decent standard of living through one's own labor;
- using new methods to stimulate labor and economic activity;
- creating civilized mechanisms for income distribution (shareholder and other forms of public participation in profit distribution, social partnership, non-state social insurance, etc.);
- developing an economic system of self-defense.

A number of benefits and guarantees play an important role in regulating social protection. In particular, the system of guarantees and benefits established for citizens and families includes:

- payment of child care allowance;
- maternity allowance, in the amount of the average wage at the workplace for a total of 26 calendar days;
- a one-time allowance at the birth of a child in the amount of twice the minimum wage;
- allowance for caring for a disabled child under the age of 18;
- allowance for people with disabilities since childhood;
- full exemption from paying rent;
- compensation for part of the payment for utilities;
- exemption from paying land tax for families with many children;
- exemption from tax on all income received in the amount of four times the non-taxable minimum for certain categories of citizens;
- targeted social support for low-income families and families with children in the form of regular cash benefits;
- financial support for temporarily unemployed persons in the form of unemployment benefits, free education with scholarships during vocational training, and a 10% increase in unemployment benefits for each dependent person in the family of the unemployed;
- a system of benefits, guarantees, and privileges established for individual citizens and families.

A comprehensive system of social security or social protection should be in place for disabled and able-bodied citizens who are unable to work or have low incomes for objective reasons. The system of social protection for such a group of the population should be based on generally recognized international norms and standards, primarily the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, ILO conventions and recommendations, documents of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, intergovernmental treaties and agreements of the CIS member states.

**Table 1**

**System of social protection and targeted support for the population in Uzbekistan**

<b>№</b>	<b>Forms of social protection</b>	<b>Categories of people in need of social protection</b>	<b>Types of payments and services</b>
1.	Social protection of the disabled and disadvantaged	Disabled people, people with disabilities	Provision of prosthetic and orthopedic products, wheel-chairs, hearing aids, books, textbooks, etc. through medical, social and labor rehabilitation centers
2.	Social protection of lonely elderly citizens who need the help of others	Lonely senior citizens	Patronage services, free provision of essential food products (a package of 9 items is provided every month), free current and major repairs of housing.
3.	Social support for low-income families and families with children	low-income families, families with children under 18 years old, mothers raising children under 3 years old	Cash and plastic benefits, financial assistance
4.	Privileges and preferences	Persons with disabilities of groups I and II, single pensioners, senior citizens who do not have the necessary pension, orphans, children from low-income families	compensation payments for housing, preferential payments for transport services, free provision of medicines and food in medical institutions, referrals for rehabilitation in sanatorium-resort institutions, prosthetic and orthopedic items, educational materials, free repairs of housing
5.	Pension provision	Pensioners	Age, disability pensions and funeral benefits
6.	Social protection of the unemployed	Unemployed citizens	Unemployment benefits and employment assistance services
7.	System of benefits for senior citizens not covered by the pension system	Senior Citizens	Pensions
8.	Social protection of children left without parental care and orphans	Orphans, children left without parental care	Improving the material and technical base of orphanages, developing a network of social rehabilitation centers for psychological support of orphans

The social support and assistance program was based on the principle of targeting and alleviating the burden of poverty. It was considered necessary to develop a system that would minimize benefits and benefits for those who do not need them.

In the second stage of economic reforms, the path to improving the social system and completing the formation of an effective mechanism for social protection of the population continued.

The state's social protection policy was launched on the basis of the principle "... we have no right to allow a sharp stratification of society for the extremely rich and the extremely poor. It is necessary to intensify the process of transition to a targeted system of assistance and support for the neediest segments of the population - children, single elderly people, and the disabled."

At the same time, the analysis of the social protection system carried out shows some of its shortcomings, and first of all, it is necessary to attribute wastefulness and insufficient social income to them. The system of subsidies, allowances and benefits did not provide for the accumulation of funds for social support of persons who really need social assistance. The allocated funds were distributed equally to everyone, factors such as acute need were not taken into account. As a result of the insufficient development of the mechanism for providing social assistance at the expense of grants allocated for the purchase of goods and services, the least needy benefited from them. The existence of an inconvenient system of social assistance, designed to cover the entire population, was based on the principle of ineffective equalization and redistribution, and this form of assistance did not have clear social support and gave rise to a dependent psychology.

These shortcomings were taken into account in the updated social protection system of the second stage of the transition period. The new mechanism for supporting the needy in determining the specific type and amount of assistance excludes any possibility of injustice and subjectivism aimed at eliminating the egalitarian psychology. Social protection has become targeted and focused. The new system of social protection has a strictly differentiated approach to different segments of the population. The funds allocated for social protection are directed to a specific person or family that really needs help and material assistance. Targeted social protection mainly covers low-income and disabled citizens and requires the unification of types and forms of benefits and payments for children.

The modern system of social protection of the population of Uzbekistan, along with state funding sources, also includes funds from labor collectives, public organizations and charitable foundations. By special resolutions of the government, the rights and responsibilities of local government and administrative bodies in implementing the social protection program for the population have been significantly expanded. Governorates and mahalla committees were given the right to introduce additional measures to ensure the implementation of state guarantees for segments of the population in need of social protection, taking into account the capabilities of the regions.

**CONCLUSION.** Taking into account the specific characteristics of the republic, these channels were clearly defined, a mechanism for ensuring the provision of social assistance by the state to a specific needy person. At the same time, the transition to market relations, sharp fluctuations in prices for goods and services required the development of measures for the social protection of persons with a permanent income (teachers, doctors, cultural workers, etc.). The social assistance and support program were aimed at preventing extreme poverty and destitution, ensuring sharp social stratification.

In order to prevent a sharp increase in inequality, measures are being taken to regulate the incomes of the population by the state. Various approaches are being used to provide material support to the low-income groups and limit the upper limit of the incomes of the high-income

groups of the population. In order to prevent sharp differences in the incomes of different social groups, systems of state regulation of incomes and taxation are used. These include:

- the use of a single tariff scale and linking the wages of different categories of workers to the minimum wage;
- regulation of funds allocated by enterprises for the payment of labor;
- taxation of income of individuals, with their level increasing.

In terms of demographic situation, in countries with a growing population, social protection of children and adolescents is a priority of state policy, while in developed countries, due to the aging of the population, pension provision and social services are used. The deterioration of the health of the population due to ecological problems and environmental pollution creates new groups in need of social protection.

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