

URGENT ISSUES IN ENSURING SOCIAL PROTECTION OF
CHILDREN FROM POOR FAMILIES

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Abstract: *The social protection of children from poor families is a critical issue that affects not only individual well-being but also the broader development and stability of society. Children growing up in economically disadvantaged households face multiple challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, nutrition, and social opportunities. These factors negatively influence their intellectual, psychological, and moral development, potentially perpetuating cycles of poverty and social inequality.*

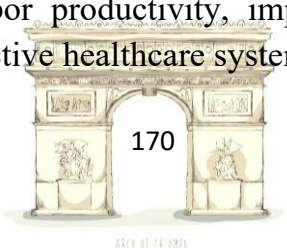
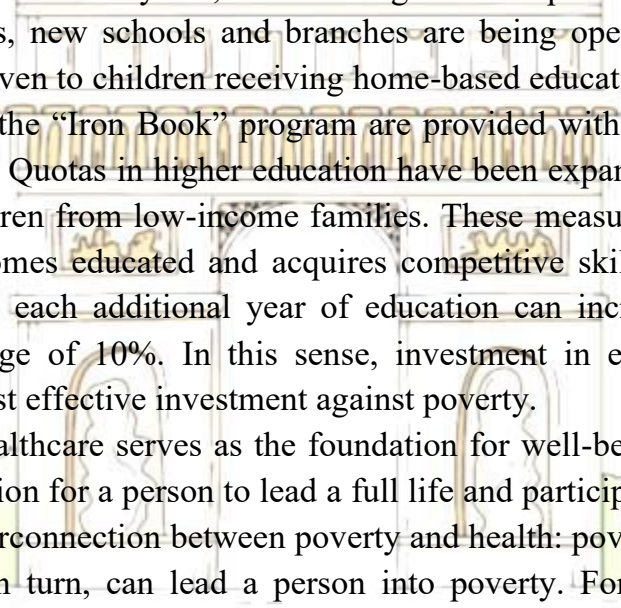
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Introduction. In Uzbekistan, investments in educational programs are being increased to reduce poverty. In recent years, the coverage of compulsory schooling has been extended to 11 years, new schools and branches are being opened in rural areas, and special attention is given to children receiving home-based education. Children from poor families included in the “Iron Book” program are provided with free learning materials and school uniforms. Quotas in higher education have been expanded, and special grants are allocated to children from low-income families. These measures help ensure that the next generation becomes educated and acquires competitive skills in the labor market. Research shows that each additional year of education can increase a person’s future income by an average of 10%. In this sense, investment in education is recognized worldwide as the most effective investment against poverty.

In any society, healthcare serves as the foundation for well-being. Good health is the most essential condition for a person to lead a full life and participate effectively in work. There is a strong interconnection between poverty and health: poverty deteriorates health, while poor health, in turn, can lead a person into poverty. For example, low-income individuals are more likely to suffer from illnesses due to poor nutrition and inadequate sanitation. If healthcare services are expensive or located far away, necessary treatments may not be received, and illnesses can worsen.

On the one hand, an unhealthy person cannot fully participate in labor activities and earn income; on the other hand, serious illnesses may force a family to spend or borrow heavily for treatment, resulting in economic decline. Millions of families worldwide fall into poverty each year due to high medical expenses-this problem is especially significant in countries without developed health insurance systems. Therefore, improving healthcare occupies a crucial place in strategies to combat poverty.

The contribution of healthcare to poverty reduction manifests in two ways: (1) a healthy population increases labor productivity, improves well-being, and positively impacts the economy; (2) an effective healthcare system prevents people from falling into



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poverty due to illness. According to research, each additional year in a population's average life expectancy can increase a country's GDP growth rate by 1–4%. Calculations by a group led by New Zealand economist J. Sachs show that investments in healthcare pay off through higher income and economic growth. Even in the wealthiest countries, attention to health contributes to economic advancement.

Therefore, states increasingly regard healthcare expenditures not merely as costs but as strategic investments in human capital and national development. Preventive medical services-including vaccinations, routine health screenings, public health education, and sanitation programs-play a crucial role in maintaining population health and preventing widespread diseases before they occur. Such preventive measures are far more cost-effective than treating diseases after they manifest, as they not only save lives but also reduce the long-term economic burden on families, communities, and national health systems.

For example, global mass immunization campaigns against preventable childhood diseases such as measles, polio, diphtheria, and whooping cough have demonstrated extraordinary benefits. These programs have saved hundreds of thousands of young lives annually and simultaneously prevented billions of dollars in potential economic losses caused by healthcare expenditures, lost productivity, and long-term disability. Scientific studies show that each dollar invested in vaccination programs yields several times its value in economic and social returns, illustrating the high efficiency and necessity of preventive healthcare strategies.

In Uzbekistan, the government has recognized the importance of such measures and has expanded comprehensive health programs targeting children and mothers. Specifically, free immunization against 12 critical diseases has been made widely accessible, ensuring that children, regardless of their family's economic background, are protected from preventable illnesses. Maternal and child protection programs have also been strengthened, focusing on prenatal care, postnatal monitoring, nutritional support, and early childhood development. By implementing these programs, Uzbekistan aims not only to improve the immediate health outcomes of its population but also to create a healthier, more productive generation capable of contributing to the country's long-term socio-economic growth.

Moreover, these investments in preventive healthcare contribute to reducing inequality, as children from low-income families-who are often more vulnerable to diseases due to inadequate living conditions-gain access to essential medical services. By improving health standards across all social strata, preventive care ensures that every child has the opportunity to grow in a safe and supportive environment, thus laying the foundation for a more equitable and prosperous society.

In summary, preventive healthcare is a cornerstone of sustainable development: it protects human life, enhances productivity, reduces economic vulnerability, and strengthens social cohesion. Therefore, Uzbekistan's expansion of free immunization and maternal-child health programs represents a forward-looking approach that combines



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public health priorities with broader socio-economic objectives, demonstrating that investment in health is, fundamentally, an investment in the nation's future.

Additionally, providing the population with access to essential healthcare services and ensuring equal opportunities to receive qualified medical care are also key factors in reducing poverty. For example, by implementing a national health insurance system, every individual's right to receive medical care is guaranteed, regardless of their financial situation. In developed countries (such as those in Europe, Japan, and others), such a solidarity-based insurance system prevents healthcare expenses from driving people into poverty. In Uzbekistan, the compulsory health insurance system, piloted in 2021, is designed with the same objective. In the future, it is planned to cover the entire country and guarantee a free basic medical package for all citizens.

When analyzing employment and sources of income, it is important to note that the primary way to escape poverty is through employment and the creation of a stable source of income. Therefore, ensuring full employment is one of the main objectives of any poverty reduction plan. If the economy provides sufficient jobs and every able-bodied person can find decent work, poverty among the population is eliminated (or only persists among those unable to work and in need of social protection). Unemployment is a direct cause of poverty, and both theoretical and empirical studies have shown that even a one-percent increase in unemployment can raise the poverty rate by several percentage points.

For this reason, in 2023, declared as "The Year of Attention to People and Quality Education" in Uzbekistan, a special state program was adopted to ensure employment. Measures were planned to create new jobs in every region, develop the private sector, and increase employment. Since small businesses and the service sector play a key role in employment, entrepreneurs are being provided with loans, subsidies, and broader opportunities by removing restrictive licenses and permits.

Some population groups require special attention in terms of employment. Unemployment rates are generally higher among youth and women. Therefore, Uzbekistan implemented initiatives through the "Youth Register" to train and employ unemployed young people and through the "Women's Register" to provide vocational training and loans for women facing difficulties in the labor market. Additionally, attention is being paid to redistributing jobs between urban and rural areas. Each village or neighborhood has "approach maps" developed to organize local enterprises. For instance, small projects are being supported, such as providing rural women with employment through handicrafts, furniture production from reeds, and opening sewing workshops.

To increase employment, the labor market itself must also be efficient and humane. This means that job seekers should be able to quickly find suitable work, and workplaces must offer fair and comfortable conditions. Therefore, it is important to improve labor legislation and strengthen labor inspections. If salaries are delayed or employees leave due to poor working conditions, these factors contribute to poverty. Consequently, amendments have been made to the Labor Code of Uzbekistan to better protect workers' rights and formalize informal employment.

Labor migration has also become a trend. Tens of thousands of people unable to find work in Uzbekistan migrate abroad (to Kazakhstan, Korea, Russia, and other countries). While these migrants may support their families financially, they can sometimes remain poor themselves due to difficult living conditions abroad. Therefore, the state implements policies to protect the rights of labor migrants, facilitate remittances, and, most importantly, create sufficient employment opportunities within the country.

In conclusion, ensuring full employment is the most transparent and effective way to eliminate poverty.

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