

The annual reports of the government of Tajikistan to the UN state the fulfillment of the obligations. Nongovernmental organizations also note that Tajikistan has taken several steps forward in protecting the rights of children over the years.

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However, as one may observe, the country has not achieved any visible success in the fulfillment of some of its obligation, including preventing children from hard work, girls' access to education and violence against children.



*The building of the Parliament of Tajikistan. Photo: DW*

22 years ago, when Tajikistan signed the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Surayo, resident of the Hamadoni district, was just one year old. Her childhood was full of hardship and her parents took Surayo out of school when she was only 13. They even forged the documents for it.

“I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade when I was forced to quit school. My parents brought some reference saying that I was transferring to another school. No one could do anything to return me back to school,” Surayo recalls.

When she was 17 and her peers continued their studies, Surayo’s parents were already

preparing for her marriage. Surayo knew nothing then about family life.

In some regions of Tajikistan, parents take daughters out of schools to organize early marriages.

According to sociologists, some parents are confident that the school will cultivate loose morals in their daughters and there will be high probability that no one marries them.

For many years, civil society and authorities have been trying to break this stereotype and attract girls to education.

According to Surayo, she protested against marriage, but no one listened to her.

“I was 17 when I was married to my aunt’s son. I did not want it. Once I even ran away and went to the police, told them everything. I don’t know what they did, but I was forced to marry anyways and this [family] life lasted only 3 months”, says Surayo.

Surayo’s marriage with her cousin was not officially registered; the parties conducted only a religious procedure - nikah.

Now Surayo is 21. For the last five years, she was not communicating with parents and relatives. She says that after the family breakdown, her relationship with her parents, who by their decision ruined her life, deteriorated and she began to live independently in a rented apartment.



*The authorities of Tajikistan are trying to return children from the streets to schools by punishing their parents. Photo: sputnik-tj.*

Surayo says that if the norms of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and other laws of Tajikistan were followed at that time, it would have prevented her early marriage and she would had now a different, better life.

In 2018, almost two thousand girls were married in Tajikistan, just like Surayo. The human rights ombudsman announced these data from the statistics of the Supreme Court of Tajikistan two months ago.

Human rights activists qualify this phenomenon as a violation of the young girls' rights and say that early marriage means depriving them of the opportunity to continue their education, to work and to develop.



Luciano Calestini. Foto: ozodi.org

Luciano Calestini, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Tajikistan, in CABAR.asia interview noted that one of the problems for children and adolescents is the lack of opportunities to continue education. Other important issues that require more attention and action are violence against children and their involvement in various jobs. UNICEF conducted a survey among 6 thousand children and teenagers. According to the results, 43% of the children said that they had been subjected to violence in the last few months

of their lives.

"Often they are exposed to violence outside and at school by their peers and family members. 43% of respondents are the children who are exposed only to physical violence, but, in general, children and teenagers face various forms of violence. We know that this problem is not new to Tajikistan, and is relevant not only for this country. We must strive to lower this number, since violence against a person in his childhood years leaves a negative mark on the health and further development of the child", he said.

Nevertheless, according to Luciano Calestini, over the past 20 years, Tajikistan has been successful in several areas in implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this regard, he noted that Tajikistan managed to reduce child mortality in half. Now this figure is 33 out of 1000. Before that, out of 1000 children in the country, up to 100 children died under 5 years of age.

The authorities note that dozens of programs are being implemented in the country that are aimed at improving children's lives and development, and in most cases, they are successful. Children's rights ombudsman Rajabmoh Habibullozoda, in one of the interviews with journalists about the implementation of the norms of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Tajikistan, said that recently Tajikistan, adopting various documents and programs, has been striving for the comprehensive protection of children's rights.

According to her, the law on parental responsibility is one of these legal acts.

According to her, "to further improve the process of educating and raising children, protecting them from various forms of domestic violence, Laws of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Responsibility of Parents for Child Education and Upbringing", "On the Prevention of Domestic Violence" were adopted, for implementation of which appropriate measures were

taken”.

The authorities consider the creation of a Commission on Child Rights in 2008 to be one of the most notable achievements in improving the situation of children’s rights in Tajikistan. In 2015, the Parliament of Tajikistan adopted a Law “On Protection of Rights of the Child”. This is the first Law of Tajikistan adopted specifically to protect the children’s rights. However, in the alternative report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child compliance, human rights organizations noted that many important aspects of the children’s situation in the country, in particular, the issue of torturing the children and problems of fair trial, are not reflected in this Law quite clearly.

In the latest alternative report of Tajikistan on the implementation of the norms of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was presented to the UN by nongovernmental organizations, it was noted that the work of the National Commission on Child Rights still has many gaps. This report notes that the results of the work of this Commission remain unclear and closed to the wider public.

“Thus, neither children’s representatives, nor public organizations take part in the meetings of this Commission”, the report says.

Until now, one of the problems that concern children’s rights organizations is involvement of children and teenagers in hard work.

One of the latest studies among adolescents aged 10-14, showed that more than 60% of Tajik children, along with studying, also work; 3% are involved in income activities.

According to children’s rights protection organizations, children cannot be involved in work for more than 4 hours a day. However, a recent study by the Center for Strategic Research and the United Nations Children’s Fund states that 11% of children and teenagers are involved in housework for more than 4 hours a day, which is also a type of child labor.

The poor economic situation in the family forced the 13-year-old Bahriddin from Dushanbe to start working. Along with other peers, he works in one of the city markets. He did not quit his studies, but hard work does not let him to engage in lessons fully.

“I study at school, but some days there is neither the time nor the opportunity to go to school. I have to work more because my father has problems with work in Russia and he often has no opportunity to send money. There are five children in the family, and if I will not work, it will be hard for my mother”, says Bahriddin.

The Tajik authorities are trying to return children from the streets back to schools by punishing their parents. According to sociologists, the chosen method is ineffective and cannot prevent the children’s involvement in work. According to the International Labor Organization, recently in Tajikistan, 10% or 270 thousand children were freed from hard work and returned to school and ordinary life.

In general, according to the results of a recent study by UNICEF and the Center for Strategic Research of Tajikistan, more than 80% of children do not have information about

their rights. Children's rights organizations claim that, in order to prevent violations of the rights of these vulnerable society members, first it is necessary to raise their awareness of their rights.



*According to the results of the last study UNICEF and Center for Strategic Studies of Tajikistan, more than 80% of children do not have information about their rights. Photo: news.tj*

After the first divorce and leaving the family, Surayo married for the second time. She believes that she was deprived of a normal childhood because of just one wrong parents' decision. She blames the delusions of her parents and the wrong performance of the Law in her difficulties.

Now Surayo tries not to let her two children to repeat her fate.

"When the obstacles are created to a girl's education and she gets forcibly married, her [family] life will not last long. She will be miserable. When I was married, I did not understand anything. I only wanted to die. I do not want my daughters to repeat my mistakes and, despite all the difficulties, I will make every effort so that they get educated and aware of their rights and not allow anyone to violate them", said Surayo.

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