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# Transitions Towards an Inclusive Future: Vocational Skills Development and Employment Options for Persons with Disabilities in Europe & Eurasia

## Executive Summary

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## **Executive Summary**

### ***Persons with Disabilities: Skills Development and Employment***

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, people with disabilities constitute at least 10 percent of any population. Worldwide, the approximate number of persons with disabilities is 650 million; for those who are of working age, the estimate is 470 million (ILO, 2007a). The ILO (2006d) estimates that unemployment rates for individuals with disabilities range anywhere from 50 percent to 80 percent internationally, rates which are two or three times higher than those for the general population. Pineda and Cuk (2007) estimate that the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) is between 80 percent and 90 percent .

High unemployment rates for persons with disabilities within Europe and Eurasia and elsewhere are in part a consequence of their limited access to education and vocational skills training. Less than 10 percent of the population with disabilities internationally attends educational institutions (UNESCO, 2006); even fewer attend vocational skills training. Consequently, persons with disabilities routinely face economic hardship. The strong relationship that exists between disability and poverty reinforces itself. Poverty makes individuals more vulnerable to disability and disability, through the lack of jobs and opportunities, reinforces poverty. Hope (2003) states that 82 percent of persons with disabilities in developing countries live below the poverty line; Elwan (1999) suggests that 15 percent to 20 percent of the poor in developing countries are disabled.

In Europe and Eurasia (statistics do not include Russia), where the government has historically been the primary provider of educational and vocational skills training and employment-related services (UNICEF, 2001), the estimated number of persons with disabilities is 16.5 million. Across the region, the governments spend up to one percent of GDP in service and care provision primarily by means of a centralized, segregated, institution-based service delivery system (UNICEF and World Bank, 2003). Unfortunately, a segregated, institution-based service delivery system is not only expensive, but it is also less effective in terms of preparing individuals to successfully transition into gainful employment and mainstream society (Tobis, 2000). Persons with disabilities who are a part of the segregated educational and vocational skills training and employment-related service delivery system in Europe and Eurasia are, unfortunately, ill-prepared to transition into gainful employment and mainstream society.

### ***A Human Rights Issue: Rights-Based Approach to Disability***

Preparation for, and subsequent integration into open, gainful employment for persons with disabilities are critical to any initiative that strives to reduce the degree of poverty experienced by persons with disabilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) is one of several international conventions (ILO Convention No. 159, 1983) that establish a legislative framework for vocational skills training and employment for persons with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> This United Nations convention, which promotes the right to work, does not establish new rights but rather qualifies existing rights and encourages strong responsibilities for state parties. Implicit in adopting the UNCRPD (nine countries have signed the Convention and four countries have ratified it across Europe

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex 3 - Policy Initiatives and Guiding International Documents on Vocational Training, Employment and Rights of Persons with Disabilities

and Eurasia) is a commitment of governments in Europe and Eurasia to move away from a “medical” model of disability and its corresponding segregated, institution-based programming approach, and towards a “social” or “rights-based” model that promotes more inclusive programming and advocates for the creation of an enabling environment within society. The **medical model** views disability as a result of an individual’s inability to function and assumes that the problem lies with the person with a disability, whereas the **social model** views disability as an interaction of a person’s functional status with the physical, cultural, and policy environment. As a result, the social model emphasizes the creation of an enabling environment that reflects society’s respect for the rights of individuals with disabilities.

## ***From Legislation to Implementation: Models and Best Practices***

Governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), disabled persons organizations (DPOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in Europe and Eurasia are starting to realize the need to increase their involvement, as well as their institutional capacities, so that commitments to UNCRPD are met, and persons with disabilities are provided with increased opportunities to gain access to mainstream society. Several countries in the region have begun to draft and adopt national social welfare legislation and policies that promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream society. These same countries have learned that the drafting and adoption of such legislation and policies have proven easier than their implementation. The successful integration of persons with disabilities is not only contingent upon the degree to which governments identify philosophically with a “rights-based” approach to disability, but also how well these same governments develop the institutional and organizational capacity to promote, facilitate, and support the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational and vocational skills development and employment-related programs that are consistent with such an approach.

International “best practices” and “lessons learned” from “model” programs can play an important role in guiding NGOs, DPOs, and CBOs in the provision of vocational skills training and employment-related services to persons with disabilities in Europe and Eurasia. After such organizations have been sensitized through awareness raising initiatives to the potential role that they can play in contributing to the creation of an enabling environment for persons with disabilities, institutional capacity building approaches and technical assistance interventions in the areas of vocational skills training and employment-related services can be introduced. When their institutional capacity has been developed, these same organizations can play a critical role in the delivery of inclusive, community-based vocational skills training and employment-related services.

## ***Report***

This report presents internationally recognized models, approaches and “best practices” in programming and implementation of vocational skills development and employment-related services that have successfully transitioned persons with disabilities into open, gainful employment. The models and approaches range from most-to-least restrictive depending on the profile and specific needs of the individual participant. Irrespective of the model or approach, emphasis is placed on facilitating the movement of an individual with disabilities from a more restrictive to the least restrictive environment in order to transition him or her toward mainstream society. A least restrictive model of vocational skills development and employment may have greater application for individuals who require less intensive and continuous support, whereas a more restrictive approach, which focuses on creating a

more supportive environment, may have greater application for severely disabled individuals. These “best practice” models and approaches have general applicability for any workforce development initiative that strives to prepare individuals with disabilities for a successful transition into gainful employment, and they could be adapted to the particular context of Europe and Eurasia.

In addition to describing various models, approaches and “best practices” for vocational skills development and employment-related services, this report identifies the target disability group for which each model or approach is best suited. Needless to say, there are several models or approaches that can be used with both disabled and non-disabled groups. The **employment trial model** and the **supported employment model** promote full participation of persons with moderate to severe disabilities (physical, mental and/or sensorial) and strive to integrate this population into mainstream society; whereas, **apprenticeship training** and **on-the-job training** are approaches that can be used with mildly disabled and non-disabled groups. Likewise, open, competitive employment, self-employment, and **social enterprises** are approaches that can be used with both disabled and non-disabled persons.

## **Goals of This Report**

The sensitization of key stakeholders on “best practices” and “lessons learned” for a “rights-based” approach to disability is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition in any effort to facilitate the transition of persons with disabilities into gainful employment and mainstream society. Additionally, targeted interventions must be designed and implemented so that the key stakeholders, i.e., NGOs, DPOs, and CBOs, are able to develop the capacity to offer “best practices” vocational skills training and employment-related services. USAID Missions in Europe and Eurasia can play a critical role in facilitating and supporting the process of creating the institutional capacity of key stakeholders to offer “best practices” skills training and employment-related services to the population with disabilities at the community level, as well as nationally.

This report outlines a set of specific recommended actions for USAID missions in the region of Europe and Eurasia regarding how to support the development of vocational skills training and employment-related services that are consistent with a “rights-based” approach to disability and will effectively contribute to the successful transition of persons with disabilities into gainful employment and mainstream society:

1. For countries that do not yet have a national transition strategy, support efforts of both the public and private sectors to develop a strategy in order to move toward a decentralized community-based service delivery system;
2. For countries that lack institutional capacity to implement the services consistent with a national transition strategy, support institutional and human capacity building initiatives targeted at national, regional and local agencies, as well as NGOs, DPOs, and CBOs, in order to implement effectively and efficiently a decentralized, inclusive, community-based service delivery system;
3. Support the design, development and implementation/piloting of different “best practices” vocational skills training and employment-related services interventions for persons with disabilities;
4. Support the development of community-based support systems, i.e., transportation and health services, required by persons with disabilities to secure and maintain open, competitive employment;

5. Support the development of a monitoring and evaluation system for successfully implemented community-based vocational skills training and employment models, as well as a service delivery system.

The conceptualization, development, implementation (on a pilot basis), and the monitoring and evaluation of vocational skills training and employment-related approaches for persons with diverse disabilities will generate important lessons learned vis-à-vis the implementation of the select approaches with public and private sector employers, as well as with the self-employed. The lessons learned from the key stakeholders, i.e., employers, technical staff, and persons with disabilities, combined with the information obtained from the monitoring and evaluation activities will provide the USAID with invaluable data upon which future decisions can be based.

1. Support the creation of a coordination body that has the capacity to (a) provide technical assistance in skills training and employment-related services to key implementing agencies; and (b) monitor and evaluate the implementation of vocational skills training and employment-related services for persons with disabilities.
2. Support the development of an advocacy group (comprised of key stakeholders) that will promote and support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in vocational skills training and employment-related services, as well as strive to strengthen inter-agency collaboration to ensure that persons with disabilities receive the support services necessary to maintain employment status.

Key stakeholders in Europe and Eurasia are in need of technical assistance and institutional capacity building support in order to implement “rights based” reforms and to provide quality services to persons with disabilities. With its inclusive approach to disability and development, its long-standing history of fostering community- and rights-based approaches to service delivery for vulnerable populations, and its commitment toward strengthening education, vocational skills training and employment-related services, USAID could play a critical role in the region’s successful transition toward an inclusive, “rights-based” approach to service delivery for persons with disabilities. Key stakeholders in the region believe that the issues of skills development, underemployment, and unemployment of persons with disabilities will not be adequately addressed without active contribution from the international community and its commitment and expertise.

## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CBR	Community-based Rehabilitation
CBO	Community-based Organization
DPO	Disabled Persons' Organization
DWA	Decent Work Agenda
DWCP	Decent Work Country Programme
ICF	International Classification and Functioning
ILO	International Labor Organization
IYDP	International Year of Disabled Persons
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNCPRD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organization