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**Possibilities of the employment of people with disabilities:**  
**Study results and recommendations**

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## **Executive Summary**

The aim of the project, implemented by the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and supported by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation was to study and formulate recommendations to support state policy for the integration into society of persons with disability through their employment. The study entailed both qualitative and quantitative parts:

Six focus group discussions and 25 in-depth interviews were carried out among the key stakeholders (i.e. persons with disabilities and their family members, representatives of NGOs, private business and state authorities) to identify the main obstacles for employment and the ways of overcoming them.

Based on the results of the qualitative study the survey was held among the 200 employees of 24 organizations to assess the attitude towards disability, social distance to persons with different types of impairment, preferred types of employment for persons with disabilities and the readiness to work next to them.

By expert estimation only one percent of persons with disabilities is employed. The reasons of low level of employment are both common to the rest of population, such as economic condition of the country, high poverty and unemployment, and also specific to the group. Below are presented the specific reasons for the unemployment of persons with disabilities and ways of overcoming them as perceived by those consulted. Although the attitudes and social distance was studied in regard of those, having physical and sensory impairments, mental and developmental problems, the study of employment possibilities was focused persons with physical and sensory impairments.

### **Main results and policy recommendations**

Disability is to viewed in a wider context of observance of human rights, social responsibility, tolerance of difference and solidarity.

Results of the study allow to identify the main barriers to the employment of persons with disabilities.

### **Attitude of population towards disability**

Attitude towards disability to a different degree underlines all the barriers to the employment. Respondents named the belief among employers that population avoids the contact with disabled persons as one of the main hindrances for their employment. Stereotype that portrays person with disability as passive, dependent, different person in need of constant care.

On the background of common for persons with all kinds of disability isolation, still the differences in attitude and distancing towards different types of disabilities became evident. The most isolated are persons with mental and then developmental problems.

Attitude change is a long and a complex process, which requires a rigorous planning and orchestration of different measures. The goal of the change should not be the idealization of persons with disabilities, but their portrayal as an ordinary members of the society, with inherent good and bad qualities.

- Public awareness campaign

Multi-component campaign should be implemented to ensure that disability is viewed, both by the population and by persons with disabilities as the aspect of life and not its end. The main instrument of attitude change should be media. TV broadcasts on the well integrated persons among the disabled should be aired, to demonstrate to the audience abilities of persons with disabilities and to stimulate persons with impairments.

- Increase of visibility and contact

Study once again confirmed that visibility and contact decreases social distance and stereotyping. Contact leads to normalization attitude towards disability. Our study demonstrated that attitude

of those who had a close contact with persons with disabilities experienced closer distance to then and held to a much more degree the normalization attitude, than those having no contact or having more superficial one. The steps for the integration should be taken already at an early age. Inclusive kindergartens, schools, hobby and sports groups, where children with disabilities and without them do things together, should be promoted. Integrated summer camps will also contribute to the change.

Not only society at large, but also persons with disabilities and their family members should become aware of the importance of contact and make steps for overcoming isolation, for getting out the home.

- To provide the information on mental health and developmental disability  
Special measures should be taken for providing the population with the information on mental health and development disabilities, to ensure acceptance by the society of persons with such problems.

- Promotion of social responsibility, solidarity and tolerance

To ensure through media coverage, education and special actions to increase tolerance of difference. Promotion of social activities based on cooperation rather than confrontation, respect of human rights and solidarity for such an attitude to become the norm for the state entities and all active social groups. To increase awareness of the organizations on the concept of social responsibility and to promote organizations demonstrating adherence to its principal.

- Training of teachers and journalists

Teachers and journalists as the main agents in the formation of public attitudes and values should be trained to be equipped with the knowledge on disability and skills for forming adequate relationships with persons with disabilities.

### **State policy and legal base**

Georgia is a signatory of the main international conventions concerning disabilities, the law on social protection of persons with disabilities is in force since 1995, but many articles of both the law and conventions remain to be implemented. The state concept on disability adopted in 2008, lists employment among the prioritized directions, but as the action plan is still in its formulation stage, it is difficult to say as to what extent employment will in fact be supported by legislation and state budget.

- Employer stimulation

Employment of the person with disabilities poses additional requirements to the employer. For real changes to happen in employment of persons with disabilities, such legal framework should be created, that stimulates employers to employ persons with disabilities.

Stimulation may be of different type. To select the most effective measure detailed consultations in multi-disciplinary groups of experts, as well as representatives of persons with disabilities and their family members should be taken. Measures can be of restrictive type-imposing quotas and fines for not complying, or rewarding- tax reduction, reduction of payments for gas, electricity of water, preferences in competition for state tenders, promotion of social responsibility of the organization through media coverage of their employment policy.

In discussing the stimulation options the principles for determining quotas, property status of the organization (state vs. private), size and sphere of activity should be taken into consideration. Self-employment should be supported by state through providing cheap and easy credits, free consultations in management and legal issues, creating incubators for self-employed persons with disabilities.

- Implementation of laws and conventions

State should take steps to ensure the implementation of the requirements on the adaptation of buildings as stated in the Georgia's law on social protection of persons with disabilities. Regular monitoring on the implementation of national laws and international conventions should be carried out and results of such monitoring publicized.

## **Types of employment**

Respondents underscored the importance and the necessity of employment for persons with disabilities. Among the forms of employment-working from home, self-employment, sheltered workshops, supported and competitive or integrated employments. The integrated employment was considered as the best for integration. But the employment types were also reviewed in regard to their availability. Everyone agreed that all forms were to be used, and that any of them was better than nothing. Although the lack of experience did not allow the respondents to make a detailed analysis, still indications of appropriateness of different types for different types of impairment, as well as positive and negative sides of each type of employment were briefly discussed.

Supportive employment was considered as the best for persons with physical impairment, and sheltered workshops for persons with hearing and visual impairments. Lack in need of transportation was considered as positive and isolation and difficulty of quality control as negative sides of working from home.

Increase of self-esteem and self-efficacy was named as positive consequences of self-employment, while difficulties in management, requirements of human capital, together with the need of financial resources were considered as its negative side.

Working next to others with similar concerns was considered both, as positive and negative effects of sheltered employment. On one hand working together with persons having similar impairments increases possibilities of sharing and understanding, but on the other hands promotes segregation. It was also admitted that sheltered employment demands considerable financial resources.

Supported employment was perceived as providing ample opportunities for integration, but need of coach and adaptation of the building were acknowledged as additional constraints for the organization.

Competitive employment, admitted as the best for the integration was seen as inaccessible for too many. The need of adaptation of the building was considered as its one more negative side.

- Creation of employment agency for persons with disabilities

To create employment agency for persons with disabilities for the coordination of activities and provision of information both to the employers and seekers of employment. The agency will collect detailed information on employment seekers, on their education, skills, possibilities and interests. In the selection of employment type considerations should be given also to the type and severity of impairment. The study proved an effectiveness of mediation, so the agency should also act as an intermediary, in case of necessity facilitating communication between employers and employees. Before launching the agency the design and testing of its model in a much smaller, e.g. district level is necessary.

- Preparation of qualified cadre

A great deficiency in a qualified cadre able to work on disability issues is felt in the country. Occupational therapist and social workers should be trained for assisting persons with disabilities to fully function in life and in a work environment.

There also exists a big gap between the demand and supply of sign language interpreters, so preparation of interpreters should be ensured.

## **Lack of information**

There is a great deficiency of statistical and any other information on persons with disabilities. Studies addressing the issues of disability and especially employment of disabled persons on a national scale has never been carried out.

Employers do not have information on employment seekers among persons with disabilities, on their possibilities, their requirements posed to work environment and more generally on the needs and constraints of these people. The persons with disabilities suffer from lack of information on employment possibilities.

- Carrying out studies

Every three years to carry out a nation-wide survey of population on matters of disability, specifically on popular attitude towards persons with different disabilities, violation of human rights, for estimation of beliefs and knowledge on disability. Results of such a study will allow for planning effective measures for changing the stereotypes, for assessing the results of public awareness campaign. Viewed separately and in dynamics, they can serve as valid indicators of democratization of the country and its adherence to liberal values.

Persons with disabilities and their families also should be studied. Their perception of public attitudes towards disability, the cases of the violation of their rights, their views on the best ways for integration will provide invaluable information for narrowing the gap between the perceptions of those with and without disabilities

### **Education**

Poor education is one of the barriers for the employment. Respondents of the survey pointed to the belief of employers that persons with disabilities not having sufficient knowledge and skills for fulfilling the tasks as one of the main hindrances for their employment. For many persons with disabilities low level of education is determined by one or more circumstances that deprived them from schooling, disabled them to attend the school.

- Providing possibilities for the life-long education

All who desires, notwithstanding the age should be given the possibility to acquire education of any level.

Special programs, with methodologies fitting the needs and abilities of persons with impairment should be implemented.

For increasing the admission chances to vocational institutions introduction of quotas might prove useful.

- Linkage of vocational education with employment

To ensure employment, vocational education should be linked with the market demands.

- Making use of existing educational resources

To use accumulated by the Non-Governmental Organizations and day centers experience and education resources for training persons with disabilities in skills for independent living and employment.

- Education of persons with hearing impairment

Study proved more isolation and distancing of persons with hearing impairment compared to those with physical and visual impairments. One of the reasons of such distancing is illiteracy and lack of knowledge of sign language of family members. Free courses of literacy and computer skills should be offered to deaf persons. Learning of sign language should be made available for all interested persons.

### **Increase of accessibility of the environment**

Construction norms are not observed and only very few public buildings are accessible for persons with disabilities. Disability, combined with poverty at large blocks the access to technical infrastructure (transportation and different means of communication), which severely restricts possibilities of mobility and interaction.

- Adaptation of the environment

Moving in the city, entering public buildings and moving in them should become possible for persons with physical impairments. In public, educational buildings and health care facilities special toilets should be built.

### **Persons with disabilities and their families**

Persons with disabilities and their families are part of the community and to some extent share the same ideological limitations. Due to the lack of chances of self-realization and leading

fulfilling life, in many persons with disabilities the learned helplessness, syndrome of dependence, passivity and pessimism is formed.

Relation of others to persons with disabilities is in a considerable degree determined by the self-perceptions of these persons. The realistic perception of oneself predetermines success. So it is necessary for persons with disabilities to acknowledge and accept impairment as a limitation, but not a catastrophe and make realistic planning.

- Increase of self-esteem

Persons with disabilities need assistance to increase self-esteem, form an adequate self-concept and to plan their career path. Such assistance is to be provided by training and psychological and career counseling.

- Education of family members on disability issues

Life of many persons with impairments almost entirely is concentrated at home, in family environment. Often family members are the only persons with whom they interact. Therefore the attitude of family members towards of persons with disabilities is of a paramount importance. There is a need of providing information to family members on the nature of disability and the right ways of dealing with it, demonstrating the harms of overprotection, leading to creating “social invalids”( Henderson & Bryan, 2004).

- Taking responsibility for own welfare

Study demonstrated that persons with disabilities and their family members put the whole responsibility on the state. The state definitely has responsibility for the welfare and social protection of its citizens, and especially for persons with impairments, but notwithstanding the difficulties they face, persons with disabilities should become a leading power in the struggle for own rights. Apart from achieving the goal, the process of defending own rights and lobbying will contribute to their integration. They should use every mean at hand for acquiring power –be it voting power, or demanding high positions in organizations working on disability issues, or making themselves visible by appearing in public meetings, media or just in streets.

We express the hope that outlined above study results and recommendations will be reflected in the action plan of the state concept of disability, which is to be due by September, 2009.