



# **Assessment of Successes and Challenges of Projects Implemented for People with Disabilities in Armenia**

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Save the Children International – LIFE Program

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## List of Acronyms

AIF	Activa International Foundation
CWG	Coordination Working Groups
DPO	Disabled Persons Organizations
EC	Employment Centers
GoA	Government of Armenia
GoG	Government of Georgia
HDP	Human Dignity and Peace Foundation
HR	Human Resources
IPDP	Individual Professional Development Plan
IR	Intermediate Results
ILO	International Labour Organization
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NC	National Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PPP	Public/Private Partnerships
PWD	People with Disabilities
SC	Save the Children
SDRS	Skills Development/Rehabilitation Specialist
SESA	State Employment Service Agency
SMEA	Social Medical Expertise Agency
STAP	Successful Transitions to Adulthood Program
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	US Agency for International Development
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WRC	Work Rehabilitation Center

## 1. Executive Summary

Save the Children, the major child-centered development and humanitarian organization (SC), has been awarded a grant from the USAID to implement Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment (LIFE) for People with Disabilities program in Armenia in 2012-2014. The LIFE program is implemented in partnership with Activa International Foundation, and local partners, including Unison DPO, Human Dignity and Peace (HDP) Foundation, Full Life NGO. The program is being implemented in close cooperation with Ministry of Labor and Social issues of Armenia (MLSI), the State Employment Service Agency (SESA), Employment Centers (ECs), Ministry of Education, Disabled People Organizations (DPOs), People with Disabilities (PWDs), NGOs, local and marz authorities, service providers, municipalities, TVET institutions and employers. The program aims at bridging certain gaps in the area of vocational education and employment of PWDs, to promote equal employment opportunities and access to employment as a basic human right for people with disabilities.

As an important initial step, SCI has conducted gap analysis aiming to reveal the organizations active in the field of disability and employment, the projects and achievements they have had and most importantly, the attempt to reveal the gaps and obstacles, which are crucial and need to be addressed to promote employment of PWDs. Gap analysis will also help to establish areas of potential cooperation among stakeholders to enhance efforts and maximise impact on PWDs.

Evaluation of successes and weakness was implemented in two stages. At the first stage the information on past and current projects implemented by identified organizations working on PWD issues was collected. The first stage of data collection was to identify organizations active in the field of disability issues. The second stage assumed in-depth interviews with major players in this field to define challenges *in education, employment* as well as *legal spheres* encountered by PWD in Armenia.

The results obtained from conducted gap analysis basically confirmed that Armenia, as other post soviet countries, tend to adopt social model of disability and promote integration of PWDs into mainstream society. In particular, Armenia has made progress in this direction, including adoption of laws enabling equal opportunities of PWDS in line with the UN Convention on Protection and Promotion of Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities; ensuring certain benefits to employers hiring PWDs; promotion of inclusive education in

secondary schools; application of certain measures improving accessibility of PWDs to educational institutions and work places.

However there are still a number of gaps restraining access of PWDs to social life, education and employment. Those include: country-wide lack of physical access to buildings and means of transportation; lack of awareness of population of PWD related issues; PWDs subjecting to stereotypes and stigma due to lack of opportunities of integration and poor awareness of public at large; limited opportunity for integrated TVET education and capacity of teachers on providing inclusive classes; poor law enforcement mechanisms related to the rights of PWDs.

The findings of conducted analysis of successes and weaknesses of projects targeted on PWDs will define areas that require: a) stronger cooperation of civil society actors; b) increased investment by donors and organizations; c) diversity of programs to support law reinforcement. The Gap Analysis report will be shared with USAID, LIFE program team and partners, as well as interested CSOs.

## **2. Background**

More than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability, and 200 million experience considerable difficulties in functioning. Across the world, PWDs have poorer health outcomes, lower education levels, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. This is partly because PWDs face barriers in accessing health, education, employment, transport services, and information. These barriers include inadequate policies and standards, negative attitudes, lack of service provision, lack of accessibility, inadequate information and communication, gender discrimination, and a lack of participation in decisions that affect their lives.

In the past 20 years Armenia greatly improved its economy, infrastructure, and public services. Still, the majority of the 185080 (as of, January 1, 2011) officially registered PWDs continue to face problems from both societal perceptions of disability; and laws and regulations which are not well enforced and are largely unknown to the PWD population. Most vocational schools lack the capacity and approaches to include PWDs in their regular programs. With a lack of training and employment, PWDs end up relying on government pensions for their support. PWDs further lack adequate access to information about their

rights, and as a result many live a marginalized existence, shunned by society and discriminated against in the workplace.

The disability policy worldwide has passed a long path starting from care in special institutions to creation of necessary conditions and equal opportunities in the areas of healthcare, education, employment, social protection and support, environment accessibility, rehabilitation of PWDs. At present, the disability policy in Armenia aims at integration of PWDs in the society to be harmonized with international standards.

The Government of Armenia gives a high priority to the issues of disability and employment. However it is worth mentioning that interest in disability issues in the Republic of Armenia started to increase only after the independence. On May 24, 1993 the Republic of Armenia was one of the first CIS countries adopted the Law on “Social Protection of People with Disabilities in the Republic of Armenia”. The adoption of the law reasoned from principles of 1975 UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons. Implicit in adopting the UNCRPD is a commitment of government to move away from a medical model of disability and 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 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. The draft “Law on Protection of Rights and Social Integration of PWDs in Armenia” currently under consideration, addresses numerous important issues and includes provisions for practical implementation of the UN Convention<sup>1</sup> (including adaptation of workplaces, transportation support etc). In fact the concept „disabled“ was for the first time given legislative definition according to which disabled were considered those persons who needed social help or protection due to activity limitations conditioned by mental or physical impairment.

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<sup>1</sup> *The UN Convention on Protection and Promotion of Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities*

### 3. Situational Analysis

Based on RA National Statistical Service data the share of the disabled in population was 5.8% in 2011. According to the above-mentioned source as of the end of 2010 in the country there were about 185,000 registered disabled persons, of which 14,355 - assigned to Disability Group I, 96,198 - Disability Group II, 66,482- Disability Group III; 8,045 had the status of disabled children.

The Social Medical Expertise Agency (SMEA) the state body to determine the disability status of a person, assigns a person to a disability group, or grants a status of “child with disabilities”, based on results of the medical-social examination.

The SMEA has a specific role in vocational rehabilitation of PWDs which assumes:

- determining the nature and extend of limited ability of a person and his/her rehabilitation potential;
- developing Individual Rehabilitation Plan of a person with disability, determining types and level of medical, social and professional rehabilitation activities, supporting implementation as well as assessing their effectiveness;
- determining the extend of a person’s loss of occupational capacity in cases of work-related injuries, occupational illnesses or other health detriments;
- counseling health organizations, employment centers and social services and provide expert opinion on medical rehabilitation, vocational guidance, suitable or not suitable job, vocational education, retraining, need of home care and other PWD relevant issues;
- issuing reports on provision of people with disabilities with necessary rehabilitation supplies;
- monitoring of rehabilitation activities and compliance of job placing, type of work and working conditions of people with disabilities with SMEA, providing on-going consultations
- receiving necessary data from the employers on nature of work and working conditions of relevant persons in case of work-related injuries and occupational illnesses.

Occupational and social rehabilitation of people with disabilities is carried out through the Individual Rehabilitation Plans which is subject to mandatory implementation by relevant bodies. IRP serves as a guarantee for PWDs, as they have a right to renounce the type, form

and scope of any rehabilitative measure incorporated into the Individual Rehabilitation Plan as well as implementation of the entire Plan.

In reality, however, according to the SMEA reports, the implementation of rehabilitation activities is challenging due to the following reasons:

1. lack of clear legal mechanisms ensuring enforcement of mentioned responsibilities of SMEA;
2. irrelevance of certain tasks to the administrative and legal structure of the Agency
3. absence of rehabilitation specialist within the SMEA commissions;
4. lack of coordination between rehabilitating organizations and SMEA commissions.

Poor implementation and follow-up of vocational rehabilitation has also contributed to high rates of unemployment among PWDs. According to NSS, 65% of total number of people with disabilities are of working age. About 21, 4% or 27,700 are considered to be employed<sup>2</sup>, however, only 9 % is employed.

The share of PWDs in the total number of employed is 1,8%, and the share of employed is 0,7%.

The table below shows distribution of employed PWDs by spheres of economy

**Table 1. Employees with Disabilities by Spheres of Economy**

	<i>share to the number of employees of the corresponding spheres, %</i>				
	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b><i>Agriculture</i></b>	-	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.6
<b><i>Industry</i></b>	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.0
<b><i>Construction</i></b>	0.1	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.3
<b><i>Services Total including:</i></b>	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.7
<b><i>Transport and communication</i></b>	0.2	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.6

<sup>2</sup> According to the country legislation besides those occupied with work activities, intramural students and land owners are considered as employed

<i>Financial intermediation</i>	-	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
<i>Education</i>	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.4
<i>Health and social work</i>	0.4	1.2	1.1	1.6	1.9
<i>Other</i>	0.2	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5

In compliance with RA “Law on Employment of population and social protection in case of unemployment“ the State Employment Service Agency is entitled to organization of vocational training and rehabilitation of job skills of the disabled individuals”. In addition to this, SESA implements other programs promoting work rehabilitation and job placement of PWDs. The State Employment Service Agency (SESA) provides employment services and short vocational training opportunities (relevant to labor market needs) to PWD job seekers (GOA Decree #533, March 30, 2006), and there are attempts to promote self-employment for PWDs; but there is no coordinated, systematic approach to address the needs of PWDs.

A number of DPOs were established in past decades; many employing PWDs. The main focus of these DPOs is promotion of rights, protection, and employment for PWDs; however, their capacities to assist PWDs are limited. Institutional capacity to conduct assessments and training, as well as skills in networking and coordination needs to be improved.

#### **4. Purpose and Methodology of Assessment**

As an initial step of the LIFE program, SCI conducted assessment of successes and challenges of projects implemented for PWDs.

The main objectives of the present assessment included:

- Reveal main stakeholders (non-government organizations) active in the field of PWDs employment
- Classify projects and activities implemented for PWDs during the last 5 years
- Categorize main directions and strategies of the projects addressing PWDs needs
- Evaluate successes and sustainable achievements of the projects
- Reveal challenges and critical obstacles in promoting equal opportunities for PWDs
- Identify remaining gaps in the sector that need to be addressed.

Based on the gap analysis results SC will highlight areas of cooperation both geographically and technically with other implementing organizations and develop further strategies for addressing identified gaps.

Evaluation of successes and weaknesses of projects targeted on PWDs was performed in February –April, 2012.

The evaluation of successes and weaknesses of projects working with PWDs was performed through desk review of projects' documentation and reports as well as through in-depth interviews with heads of implementing organizations.

At the **first stage** a list of local, foreign and international organizations working with/on disability issues was developed. Specific questionnaires to capture information on past and current projects were sent to all known organizations working in the field. Organizations were asked to fill up information on specific projects targeted on PWDs, including goal and objectives, performed activities, main achievements and failures, as well as status of ongoing work.

The **second stage** of data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with implementing organizations and service providers. Developed in-depth interview guide contained questions on main challenges and obstacles faced by organizations in education, employment and legal spheres.

Data collection tools are attached (see Attachment 1).

**During the first stage** the following 20 organizations filled-in questionnaires developed by the LIFE Program:

1. Agate NGO,
2. Apaven NGO,
3. Armenian Dream NGO,
4. Bridge of Hope NGO,
5. Disabled Sports and Culture Center
6. Full Life DPO,
7. Human Dignity and Peace Charitable Foundation,
8. Institute of National Leadership,
9. Khariskh NGO

10. Lusastgh NGO,
11. Luysi Shogh NGO,
12. Meghvik NGO,
13. Paros DPO,
14. Prkutyun DPO,
15. Pyunik NGO,
16. Scarp NGO,
17. UNDP,
18. Union of People with Hearing Impairment,
19. Unison DPO,
20. World Vision Armenia INGO.

The participating organizations provided information on their past and current projects, mentioning their duration, location, target groups, objectives, main achievements as well as challenges occurred during the implementation.

The compiled data on projects and implementing organizations is presented in the attached table.

After the first stage, SC conducted data analysis and selected 12 organizations that implemented more than one project dedicated to PWDs employment, vocational education and legal field improvement, following by the second stage of in-depth interviewing with Agate, Bridge of Hope, Full Life, Human Dignity and Peace Charitable Foundation, Khariskh, Lusastgh, Paros, Pyunik, Scarp, Union of People with Hearing Impairment, Unison and World Vision Armenia.

## **5. Main Findings**

Over the past 5 years in total 76 projects were implemented by 20 organizations. 13 of 20 (63%) participated NGOs have disability issue stated in the mission statement of their organizations, which means that these NGOs are mainly concerned with disability issues. 25 projects (or 35%) were either one-time events or short-term projects lasted less than 6 months.

For the purpose of this assessment, the following organizations/projects were not taken into consideration:

- Organizations having no substantial work done in the area of disability,
- Projects of less than 6 months in duration,
- Projects implemented before 2007.

Therefore,

- Analysis has been performed in relation with 51 projects implemented by 20 NGOs and DPOs having extensive experience in working with PWDs,
- Out of 51 projects assessed, the highest number of projects were implemented in Yerevan (27 projects), Shirak (10 projects), and Lori (6 projects).

The assessed projects were grouped according to their main thematic directions falling into one of the following category of activity, see table 2.

Table 2. Projects according to main directions and thematic areas

<b>##</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b># of Projects in which this thematic area was addressed</b>	<b>Organizations</b>
1	Improving access and adaptation of environment to PWDs needs	9	Unison, Full Life, Khariskh, World Vision, Paros, Pyunik, Scarp, Lusastgh,
2	Psycho-Social support to PWDs	5	Scarp, Paros, Agate
3	Advocating for PWDs' rights, and lobbying for legislative changes	10	Unison, Full Life, Khariskh, World Vision, Paros, Pyunik, Scarp, Lusastgh, Apaven, Agate
4	Raising Public Awareness on PWDs issues	18	Unison, Full Life, Khariskh, World Vision, Paros, Prkutyun, Scarp, Lusastgh, Apaven, Agate, Bridge of Hope UNDP, HDP,
5	Out of School activities for Children with Disabilities	6	Armenian Dream, Meghvik, Prkutyun, Institute of National Leadership,
6	Healthcare support to PWDs	4	Luyisi Shogh, Prkutyun, Pyunik, Disabled Sports and Culture Center, Bridge of Hope
7	Capacity building of service providers	4	Lusastgh, WV, HDP

8	TVET/Skills Development	17	Full Life, UNDP, Khariskh, Scarp, Pyunik, Prkutyun, Paros, Disabled Sports and Culture Center, Meghvik, Luysi Shogh, Lusastgh, Apaven, Agate, Bridge of Hope
9	Education of Children with Disabilities	6	Disabled Sports and Culture Center, Full Life, World Vision, Pyunik, Lusastgh, HDP, Unison, Armenian Dream, Bridge of Hope
10	PWDs employment	18	Full Life, Khariskh, UNDP, Pyunik, Luysi Shogh, Paros, Lusastgh, HDP, Unison, Agate, Union of People with Hearing Impairment

Consequently,

- 35% of projects were aimed at raising public awareness on PWDs issues,
- 35% of projects promoted employment of PWDs,
- 33% provided TVET/Skills Development of PWDs
- 20.7% were directed to advocacy/legal changes,

It is worth mentioning that ensuring physical access to infrastructure was addressed through 9 projects (19.5%), and while this is a common issue everywhere in Armenia, donors have not granted major funding for this fairly considering that such issues should be resolved by local community municipalities.

***One important conclusion is derived from the above: disability prevention as well as detection in early ages has not been sufficiently addressed, and thus those areas require future attention of donors and implementing agencies.***

While there is a State commitment to achieve by 2022 that all country schools are inclusive, in reality, children with severe disabilities are deprived from mainstream education due to lack of projects to prepare them for mainstream education, inaccessibility of regular schools (in their vast majority) to accept children on wheelchairs, negative behavior of peer and their parents towards children with disabilities. Moreover, out of school activities that would address integration of children with disabilities (4 projects) are insufficient, small in scale and duration.

As the country has been transitioning from medical model of disability to the social one, NGOs and DPOs have been actively advocating for provision of equal conditions and opportunities to PWDs, equal rights to education, employment, social activities, reducing stigma and discrimination in different spheres of life.

We can see that projects of direct assistance, such as provision of rehabilitation supplies, drugs, etc. which prevailed several years ago and especially after the earthquake, are currently not so much being implemented. For all NGO's the protection of rights, awareness raising, overcoming stigma of PWDs and their family members' have become a priority issue.

The major efforts of DPO's over the past 5 years have been targeted on breaking the stereotypes and perceptions of the society and drawing the attention of the public at large on disability issues. The projects and activities of non-State actors aimed at supporting social integration of PWDs and recognition of a person with disabilities as a full member of the society. In this regard NGOs have played crucial role in supporting and pushing the state bodies for developing policies supporting rights and integration of PWDs.

## **6. Achievements and Challenges of Assessed Projects**

### ***Improving physical accessibility and adaptation of environment to the PWDs needs***

Eight out of 20 organizations participated in the present study mentioned projects activities aimed at improving physical access of people with different types of disability to public buildings (residential, industrial, healthcare, educational, sport, cultural, etc.), roads, pedestrian crossings and underpasses, transportation and infrastructure.

Certain advancement in provision of physical access was made during the last years. The specific measures included installation of ramps in few buildings and central streets of Yerevan, procurement of few transportation means adjusted for wheelchair user PWDs. For instance adjustment of polling station for electorate with disabilities became possible due to Lusastgh and Paros NGOs projects support. Sign language translators and escort were provided to the deaf and blind electors to instruct them during the voting process. As a result, more PWDs participated in elections.

The Interagency National Committee on Disability Issues established by RA Prime Minister's decree in 2008 approached to RA Ministry of Territorial Administration, Ministry of Education and Science, RA Ministry of Healthcare, RA Governors, Mayors, Rectors of

Higher Educational institutions with request of accessibility provision for PWDs in new buildings and public places, including educational and medical institutions.

Taking into account the pedestrian's entitlement to safe mobility and creating conditions corresponding to international standards, such as provision of sound signals in traffic lights, and accessible parking spaces for PWDs, the Committee recommended to make amendments to Government Decision on "National Road Safety Strategy for Armenia and Yerevan and Five Year Action Plan". Additionally, there are two GoA Decisions on provision of access of buildings, transport and infrastructure for PWDs (N 392, February 16, 2006) and approved construction norms (N 253, November 10, 2006).

***However this issue is still challenging, as practice shows, that few procedures are implemented to redesign buildings, transport or infrastructure:***

- Law reinforcement and controlling mechanisms are poor at all levels, as a result, even the infrastructure performed by municipal authorities (under- or over-ground street passages, municipal building and newly acquired public transport means) do not provide access to PWDs with physical impairments.
- There is no consistent strategy applied in the country to redesign public places in consistence to the PWDs needs. Monitoring implemented by "Astghik" NGO in 2010 show that few central streets in Yerevan city are equipped with ramps, installed ramps do not meet accepted norms, and 60% of crossroads in the center of Yerevan are not adapted for PWDs. There is no crossing that can be regulated manually (by pushing button). No adjustment was made to ensure accessible environment for people with visual impairments, such as sound system on traffic lights.
- There are no adjusted sport grounds, children playgrounds, and public resort places. Layouts of new constructed buildings do not include accessibility measures as well. Observations prove that the situation with physical access of PWDs is even worse in the marzes.

### ***Raising public awareness on PWDs issues***

The majority of surveyed NGOs had public awareness component included in their project. Interviewed experts stated considerable gap in public awareness on disability issues,

“ignorance” of PWDs by population, and even family members. As mentioned by “Paros” DPO members “...existing stereotypes, negative attitude, stigma of “sick, defective people”, underestimation of real capacity of PWDs are significant barriers in the way moving to the inclusive society. Such attitude in its turn produce self-stigma, psychological complexes and fear in PWDs hindering their integration into society”.

Analysis has shown that most of awareness-raising activities conducted by Survey participants were just one-time events for limited number of beneficiaries (E.g, marches, cultural events, such as thematic movie watching, photo contests, crafts' exhibitions as well as sport competitions among PWDs). Long-term activities included implementation of periodic, regional (Caucasus) conferences for PWDs with experience exchange (Khariskh), series of round-tables in of RA marzes

Among visible successes in this field are the following:

- <http://www.disabilityarmenia.am/> **web-site administered by the Ministry of LSI and aimed at raising** public awareness on main PWDs concerns and their possible solutions. The website created with the support of WV is regularly updated, providing comprehensive information on disability issues. Thus PWDs themselves and general public as well have opportunity to learn about current and envisaged programs, policies, reforms, etc.
- Public activities implemented annually by different organizations to observe the International Day of Persons with Disability day – December 3. Those are usually organized large-scale with the involvement of Mass Media and government decision-makers.
- [www.jobs.disability.am](http://www.jobs.disability.am) website created by Unison DPO provides excellent information on disability and employment issues

The mentioned activities are reported to have influenced public awareness in certain extent. Among most repeated challenges were lack of funding required for long-term and large-scale awareness campaigns; lack of knowledge of international experience and best practices, and lack of communication of DPOs with international counterparts. In some cases poor coordination of activities of different agencies in Armenia also challenged the achievement of desired results.

### *Advocacy for PWDs rights, improvement of legislation*

Almost 50% of participated NGOs (10 out of 20) mentioned advocacy component/ activities in support of equal rights and opportunities for PWDs, as part of their projects. The activities in this area include advocacy for:

- improved accessibility
- PWDs social inclusion, education and integration of PWDs to the labor market (Unison, Khariskh, and Full Life).
- Enhancement of health and social benefits for PWDs.
- 

Most of advocacy activities implemented by NGOs were low-budgeted, short-term, low scale and did not achieve sustainable results.

Some of NGOs conducted Research on various PWDs issues. Those include:

- survey of employers conducted by HDP Charity Foundation in Yerevan in 2009;
- research on care reforms of socially vulnerable children conducted by Apaven in 2006.
- Reports on main findings are widely distributed and used as advocacy tools.

Among the successes it should be noted that the GoA has adopted a number of laws and decrees concerning PWDs issues during the last few years. Among those are: RA Law on Social Protection of PWDs (1993), RA Law on social assistance (2005); RA Law on provision of medical services to population; 2006-2015 National Strategy for Social protection of PWDs in RA (2005); Decision on policies and procedures of SMEA commissions (2006); decision approving minimal criteria of provision of care and social services to elderly and PWDs (2007); decision on installation of AREV software for people having visual impairments in RA public libraries (2008);

MLSI has submitted to the Government the draft of Law on “Protection of Rights of People with Disabilities and Social Inclusion in the Republic of Armenia” (November, 2010), which emphasized the need social inclusion of PWDs in addition to their rights protection.

The employment rights and warranties of PWDs are fixed in special legislation as well as in general legislation (RA Constitution “Labour Code”, “Law on Social Protection of Disabled Persons”, “Law on Employment of Population and Protection in Case of Unemployment”,

“Law on State Pensions”, “Law on Medical Care and Services to the Population”, “Law on Education”, “Law on Education of Disabled Persons who Need Special Educational Conditions”, GoA Decree on provision of benefits for employers to hire PWDs workers (2006), GoA Decree on provision of employment services and short vocational training opportunities (relevant to labor market needs) to PWD-job seekers by the State Employment Service Agency (SESA) (2006). The Constitution endowed with supreme legal force states the right of disabled person to be protected from discrimination “Everyone’s equality before the law”.

Mentioned legislative acts stipulate for certain benefits in social and healthcare sphere, as well as some mechanisms enhancing PWDs access to education and employment.

The legally stipulated benefits include:

- Provision of free (paid from State Budget) *health* services to PWDs, including outpatient and inpatient medical services, drugs (from essential drug list), rehabilitation supplies and aids, sanatorium and resort therapy,
- Provision of certain benefits in *education* sector – a)PWDs have certain advantages over others in competition for university entrance, b)the tuition fee of students with disability admitted to higher educational institutions is paid from the state budget, c)students with disability group I and II are provided with scholarships; d) invested “Arev” computer software *for persons* with visual impairment in institutions and public libraries, giving opportunity to master computer skills to visually impaired people, e) State employment Service Agency (*SESA*) organizes vocational training and re-training of PWDs implementing work rehabilitation programs,
- Provision of benefits in *employment* sector: Rewarding mechanisms for employers hiring PWDs such as partial reimbursement of salaries (50% of minimal salary) of people with disabilities to employees hiring *people with* disabilities.

Improvement of the legislation from PWDs perspective and monitoring of the law implementation are also considered by respondent NGOs as main areas of work.

Monitoring of SMEA system discovered for instance

- PWDs complaints on SMEA commissions’ decisions on disability types/ groups, as well as PWDs’ Individual rehabilitation plans,
- The necessity of inclusion of the “PWDs advocate” in the SMEA Commissions as far as the structure is “corrupted”,

- Poor awareness of PWDs on their rights and lack of trust to government.

Analysis of the legislation underlined:

- The necessity to adopt rewarding mechanisms for employers,
- Benefits for organizations hiring people with disabilities.
- positive discrimination measures

*The Positive discrimination tool - quota for PWDs was fixed in former RA Law on "Employment of population" (in force in 1993- 2006), Article 11 according to which RA Government should define sustainable quotas for job-placement or creation of new jobs for PWDs. The sanction for employers in case of not fulfilling quota obligations was payment levy to Employment Fund at the amount of one employee's annual average salary for one job. However, this statutory obligation did not work and the Government did not set quotas due to difficulties typical of transition countries. These obligations were not included in the recent "Law on employment of population and social protection in case of unemployment" adopted in 2006.*

### ***Out of School activities for Children with Disabilities***

Among projects with longest duration were mostly out-of-school activities for children with disabilities. Prkutyun and Meghvik NGOs maintain day care centers for children with special needs, there mentally disabled children and their families get various support services, such as art therapy, crafts teaching, psychological assistance, speech therapy, physical training, social skills building, computer classes, including JAWS ("Job Access with Speech" computer screen reader program for Microsoft Windows) for visually impaired, etc. Development center maintained by Prkutyun NGO is supported by MoSLI (staff salary is paid from state budget).

Similar development centers are established in 4 towns of Tavush marz with the support of Bridge of Hope NGO.

According to surveyed experts, day care centers help children and adolescents with special needs building certain skills for better integration into society. Such centers need to be established throughout the country. Again lack of state and donors' funding is mentioned as a main challenge for expansion of activity.

### ***Healthcare support to PWDs***

The situation with provision of PWDs with essential healthcare aids and supplies is improving each year (National report of National Commission on PWDs issues (03.06.11, 10 sessions). The basic medications (from the essential drug list approved by MOH) are provided free to all PWDs. State budget covers also prostheses, orthopedic and other rehabilitation aids, including hearing aids, wheel-chairs, orthopedic shoes, extremity prosthesis, eye prosthesis, walkers, crutches. So the role of NGO in providing direct humanitarian aid is diminishing. That is proved also by the data provided in the current assessment. Only 5.5% of projects have direct aid direction.

### ***Education of Children with disabilities***

About 50% of NGOs participated in the assessment (Bridge of Hope, Disabled Sports and Culture Center, Full Life, World Vision, Pyunik, LusAstgh, HDP, Unison, Armenian Dream) had projects promoting education for children with disabilities. Two big 3 years programs were implemented by World Vision and Unison. During the whole course of the program 175 CWD were identified in communities and brought to schools.

The concept of inclusive education that is relatively new for Armenia needs further development especially in marzes. A number of projects was implemented by Bridge of Hope NGO to advocate for inclusive education in Armenia. Another problem is inclusive pre-school education, and according to the WV program manager: "... children with special needs usually have limited access to pre-school and further education, as they are usually kept at homes. An experience shows that it is essential to provide pre-school training prior to bringing children with disabilities to general schools. Development centers maintained for children with disabilities in the frame of mentioned NGOs projects play important role here". However due to lack of funding they are operating in few communities only. Since there is a lack of inclusive state kindergartens, NGO projects targeted on inclusive daycare for young children with disabilities are still relevant and need continued funding and further expansion.

Certain achievement shall be noted here:

- State adoption of the concept of inclusive education, there are 107<sup>3</sup> schools currently providing inclusive education in Armenia. By 2022, all schools in Armenia will be inclusive

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,,ARM,,50dc04eb2,0.html>

- With the support of “Bridge of Hope” NGO 50 schools in Tavush marz were provided with computer equipment and necessary didactic materials; 1600 teachers of the mentioned schools were trained on inclusive education concept as well as school and class management; 1460 children with special needs were identified and assessed.
- Certain awareness of general population, including parents, teachers on inclusive education concept and its advantages
- Increasing examples of tolerant and friendly attitude towards CWD in schools both from staff and children

As an achievement in the category of education for children with disabilities was mentioned development of Armenian and English Sign Language dictionaries with the support of Union of People with Hearing Impairment. The dictionaries were easy for self-study and helped families to communicate with family members having hearing impairment. Moreover, knowledge of English Sign Language supported enhancement of persons with hearing impairment perspective to communicate abroad.

At the same time a number of challenges was mentioned by surveyed experts in the area of education for CWD, such as

- Considerable level of stigma, stereotypes and negative attitude of public to PWDs issues (many parents are objecting the idea), underestimation of PWDs capacity
- Lack of physical access to educational institutions - inaccessible buildings, infrastructure, and lack of transportation. Most of the schools do not offer access for children on wheelchair and thus can be considered inclusive only for children with certain types of disabilities.
- Lack of pedagogical skills and practice among teachers of general schools
- Disproportionately high ratio of children – teacher in one class, e.g. 40:1, that negatively impact on the quality of educational process
- Lack of teaching materials, accustomed curricula, visual aids and equipment in schools
- Lack of awareness, “illiteracy” among parents, especially in remote regions on inclusive education and on children rights in general; “over care” demonstrated by parents deprives disabled children from the opportunity to contact with peers, making them incommunicative and isolated from the society.
- Repeated health problems and unavailability of qualified medical personnel in schools are negatively impact on attendance of inclusive classes

- Lack of funding for pre-school preparation of children with special needs
- Lack of opportunities for PWDs distant education

### ***Technical Vocational education and Training (TVET) /Skills development***

Almost 70% of participated in the assessment NGO implemented projects aimed at building certain skills among PWDs. According to respondents it is very important direction, that gives opportunity to PWDs even with severe mental disability to master some technical skills to become competitive in the labour market. However most of the projects (62%) had only several months duration. Those included various courses organized for PWDs, including sewing, carpet making, handicrafts, embroidery, wood carving, ceramics, renovation of supplies for PWDs, hairdressing, as well as JAWS computer classes for the people with visual impairments. Some NGOs provided on-line training courses in building job seeking skills such as resume writing, interview skills, computer operation, as well as social skills like communication, conflict management, etc. However, due to lack of funding such projects had limited scope and short duration.

Among significant achievements we can mention introduction of two vocational courses - Gardening and Carpet manufacture into the curriculum of Yerevan State Humanitarian College. That become possible with the support of Mission East and Bridge of Hope NGOs. In the framework of the program all necessary teaching equipment was provided to the College, curriculum was designed, 79 teachers trained and 9 residents of «Jermik ankyun» collective house currently studying in departments of gardening and carpet manufacturing.

Challenges:According to the respondents among the most challenging problems in education is lack of appropriate conditions/ accessibility to continue education after school in universities or TVET institutions for PWDs. The latter was especially emphasized for children with visual impairments, who need educational materials adapted to Braille system.

Finding a suitable job after attending vocational education training remains challenging for majority of PWDs, which indicate the fact that the projects did not ensure sustainability.

### ***Promotion of PWDs employment and raising their competitiveness on labor market***

Employment of PWDs is one of the most challenging social issues in Armenia.

The GoA made significant advancement in PWDs employment issues during the last few years.

The State Employment Service Agency is entitled to organization of vocational training and rehabilitation of job skills of the disabled individuals. In addition to this, SESA implements other programs promoting work rehabilitation and job placement of PWDs, as follows:

- Vocational training of PWDs, rehabilitation of work abilities (component of vocational rehabilitation). The aim of vocational rehabilitation is to support the job-placement or entrepreneurial activities of PWDs through acquiring new competences and skills relevant to present labor market demands.
- Financial support to unemployed and persons with disabilities for undertaking entrepreneurial activities. Within the framework of this program in 2009 and 2010 respectively 4 and 8 PWDs were registered as private entrepreneurs.
- Establishment of rehabilitation center for persons with disabilities in Gyumri with the support of a number of international organizations (2008). Activity of the center aimed at revealing, assessing and developing the working abilities of PWDs by means of using different technical and expertise methods
- Partial salary compensation to the employers in case they employ uncompetitive groups in the labor market. The employer receives compensation for each uncompetitive person at the amount of 50% of salary set by the employer, but no more than the amount of the minimum monthly salary
- Organizations of internship with employers
- Workplace adjustment for job seeking unemployed disabled at the organization
- Besides the above-mentioned programs the employment offices involve PWDs in "Organization of Paid Public Works" program to promote their temporary employment and mitigate tension in labour market. (Their number was about 5 % in total number of the involved-6254, in 2010).

Along with the State policies, the complementary role of NGO sector remains very important in addressing PWDs employment issues.

11 NGO out of 20 assessed have implemented projects promoting PWDs employment. Those projects are focused on different aspects of PWDs employment, such as capacity building of TVET specialists, job seeking skills development, job coaching, job placement of PWDs, work with employers, workplace adjustment, and establishment of social enterprises.

Among achievements are the following:

- Introduction of MAST/Ruward tests for assessment of PWDs by Human Dignity and Peace Foundation (in cooperation with Activa International)
- Organization of the country-wide job fair for PWDs by Unison NGO,
- Establishment of [www.jobs.disability.am](http://www.jobs.disability.am) web-site by Unison (large number of Internet user-PWDs have access to existing job opportunities, job-seeking advices, information and links on employers as well as disability related legislation),
- Establishment of social enterprises in cooperation with “Astghatsolq” and 'Union of the blinds in Armenia' NGO's. (The enriched logistics and newly procured equipment create possibility to increase production volume in these enterprises),
- Establishment of [www.handmadegifts.am](http://www.handmadegifts.am) on-line shop by “Astghatsolq” (to sell the craft products made by PWDs )
- Running of on-line courses for PWDs providing tips on job seeking and information on employment requirements supported by InWENT German organization

Despite of considerable number of activities implemented in PWDs employment sector both by state and NGO structures, as of respondents the issue still remains challenging due to the following reasons:

- Lack of working and professional skills among PWDs due to unavailability of getting appropriate education (In fact, low level of professional competence makes PWDs less competitive on the labor market. Several NGOs noted limited opportunities for internship, practice, retraining, and on-the-job training),
- Psychological complexes, problems in communication and cognitive comprehension, self-stigma that stemmed from PWDs isolation from the society. (PWDs’ inner problems cause much more difficulties in getting any appropriate job. In certain cases PWDs have no desire to work, relying on the State or organizations’ support )
- Lack of suitable job opportunities for PWDs. People with visual or hearing impairments need specific jobs that are limited in Armenia,

- Lack of knowledge of PWDs on their employment rights and legally stipulated benefits,
- The reluctance of employers to hire PWDs taking into consideration intensive labour supply in a market. (In some cases they are unable or unwilling to accommodate their work places in accordance with the needs of PWDs, because of underestimation of PWS work capacity, fear of their high absenteeism, as well as lack of knowledge on supportive laws and policies for employers),
- Lack of physical access to transportation, workplaces, not adjusted working environments to PWDs needs,
- Limited market to consume production of social enterprises established for PWDs. (Prkutyun NGO has faced the problem with realization of embroidery items made by mentally disabled beneficiaries. Lack of funds to organize exhibition shops is the main challenge),
- Lack of Individual Professional Development Plans for PWDs. (In some cases the Individual Rehabilitation Plans approved by SMEA that suppose to ensure occupational and social rehabilitation of PWDs, significantly limits the scope of work that given person is allowed to perform. Besides, occupational rehabilitation includes vocational guidance. However, there is no system of vocational guidance invested in our country. The only organization is Youth Professional Orientation Center, operating in Yerevan which has 6 employees and is not accessible for moving impaired youth.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The analysis of successes and challenges in PWDs education and employment once more confirmed that despite certain achievements in those areas there are also significant gaps that should be effectively addressed. This should be a result of joint efforts of the governmental sector, NGOs, private sector and PWDs themselves.

Some specific suggestions made by surveyed NGOs are listed below:

1. Development of effective and efficient criteria for classification of PWDs (assessment of their employability) by all organizations working with PWDs;

2. Involvement of NGOs working with PWDs in SMEA Commissions' operations to contribute to Individual Rehabilitation Plans Development;
3. Organization of NGO campaigns and joint actions to advocate for equal employment opportunities for PWDs;
4. Provision of productive and long-standing cooperation of NGOs and DPOs with local municipalities, SESAs and ECs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Issues Affairs. Some innovative approaches implemented by DPOs need to be institutionalized. That social partnership will contribute to better inclusion of PWDs in educational and employment prospects;
5. Attraction of donors for expansion of development centers for children and adolescent with special needs;
6. Attraction of donors for joint advocacy and public awareness raising campaigns on PWDs' issues;
7. Attraction of donors for expanding social enterprises for PWDs throughout the country, especially for people with mental, visual and hearing impairments, whose job opportunities are very limited;
8. Continued work with employers to promote PWDs employment, especially in industry and services sectors.