

FRI-K1-1-QHE-11

THE MAIN FACTORS IN ENSURING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ms Elena Lisnic – Principal Consultant

Directorate for National Qualifications Framework,
Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova
Tel.: +373 22 233 652
E-mail: e.lisnic.edu@gmail.com

***Abstract:** One of the current problems in addressing disability is the educational and social inclusion of young people with disabilities in higher education, which is important in many ways. This article provides theoretical and practical information on various aspects of social and educational inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova.*

***Keywords:** discrimination, accesibility, disability, vocational training, equalization of rights, employment*
***JEL Codes:** I21, I24, I29*

The beginning of inclusive higher education in the Republic of Moldova was set after 1990, as an incentive for that acting the United Nations Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Disabled Persons, Resolution 48/96 of 20 December 1993.

Taking over European good practices promoted by NGOs, the Republic of Moldova launched the process of replacing the medical model of disability approach with the social one that worked successfully in the developed countries of Europe and the US where government and society were concerned about creating necessary conditions to realize the rights and chances of social integration of people with disabilities.

The Republic of Moldova ratified the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD), by Law No. 166-XVIII of 09.07.2010, showing will to develop and promote specific policies in the field of social inclusion of the persons with disabilities and adjust the national legislation to the international one. Moldova's ratification of the Convention has marked a significant change in the field of disability.

Currently, the legislative and normative framework of the Republic of Moldova in the field of vocational education and development does not discriminate people with disabilities, giving them equal opportunities in the field of vocational education and professional orientation, along with the persons without disabilities (excepting the fields of education and specialties in which people with disabilities cannot physically cope, e.g. military specialties, protection, security, guard, etc.).

Moreover, people with disabilities benefit from special provisions in the normative and legislative acts for their vocational education and professional orientation. So:

- according to the *Framework Regulation on the organization of admission in the first cycle – higher education – bachelor degree*, elaborated and approved by the Ministry of Education, over the period of many years a **15% quota is foreseen** from the total number of places of the matriculation plan with budgetary financing, allocated to certain **categories of people from disadvantaged families, including children with a severe or pronounced degree of disability**;

- according to the provisions of the Regulation on the conditions for the occupation of places with budgetary financing, approved by ME order No. 748 of 12 July 2013, the orphan students and the persons with a severe or pronounced degree of disability keep the status of budgetary students during their whole period of studies;

- according to the changes made in the *Regulation on the exemption from the payment of the study fee for students and pupils of higher education and specialized secondary education institutions enrolled on a contractual basis*, approved by the Government Decision No. 125 of 15.02.2001, **people with disabilities who study at the part-time education benefit from the payment exemption.**

- according to the *Framework-Regulation on the functioning of student dorms under the jurisdiction of state education institutions*, approved by GD no. 74 of 25 January 2007, the **disabled persons benefit, if they require, separate space in the rooms on the ground floor (the first floor of the dorm)**.

To be noted that the legal framework for implementing the social model of disability approach is strictly necessary, but it is not sufficient for translating its principles into life. Much more difficult is the process of social empowerment of people with disabilities, their training – physical, mental, emotional – for integration into the environment (family, educational institution, job, etc.).

The process of social empowerment is a lasting one and success is ensured by its early onset. The social integration capacity is nurtured from the first days of life – in the family, including the kindergarten, school, other social structures. Once mature, these people will be able to cope with the challenges of independent life, one of its aspects being also vocational studies, along with other young people without disabilities, on the basis of the same study programs with the same employment prospects and, implicitly, with the same chances for a decent life.

As a result of the implementation of the social model of disability approach, the urgent necessity of reorganizing and putting on the foundations of the higher education system emerged. To ensure the autonomy of young people with disabilities in the university environment is to be reformed and adhered to their special requirements. Only then can we talk about respecting the basic concept of the social model, namely: not only the theoretical chances set by law, but also the real/concrete possibilities of persons with disabilities must be identical to those of people without disabilities.

It is worth mentioning that during the last 5 years the number of people with disabilities increased by 3.8% (about 184.3 thousand people). People with disabilities represent 5.2% of the country's total population. Almost every seventh person with disabilities falls into the category of severely disabled.

At the same time, according to the information provided by the higher education institutions of the Republic of Moldova, the number of persons with disabilities enrolled in higher education represents only 0.004% (about 300 persons) of the total number of about 80000 students.

The most demanded specialties include Medicine, Law, Public administration, Information technologies (Fig.1).

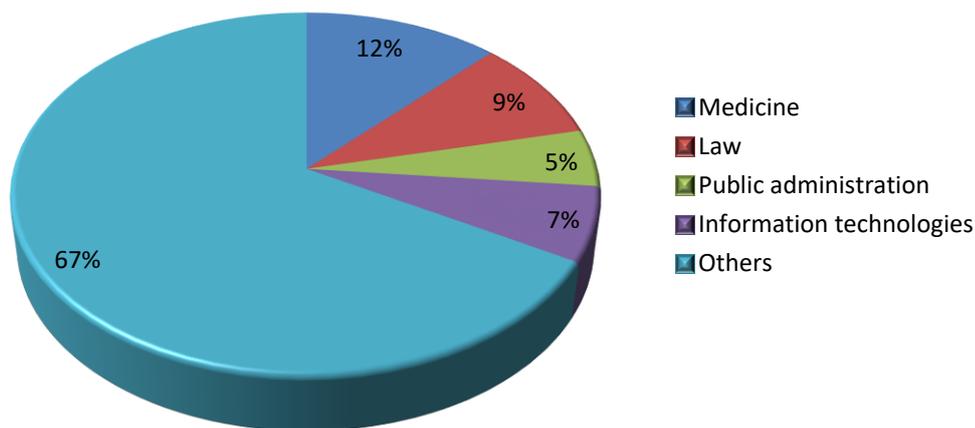


Figure 1. Specialties demanded by people with disabilities.

Statistics from the Republic of Moldova show that a person with disabilities finds a job easier if he/she has technical or higher professional education. In developed countries, the share of students with disabilities in higher education fluctuates between 3 and 7 percent.

Some unofficial sources account for about 20 percent of the total number of disabled people who are employed in the Republic of Moldova. But according to international standards, the situation in this field is considered favorable, if about 40 percent of people with disabilities have a job.

Therefore, ensuring access to higher education for people in that category leads to improved living.

Over the past 10 years, higher education institutions have taken several actions to integrate people with disabilities into the university environment. Thus, at the institutional level were:

- elaborated individual education plans for the persons that cannot go to the places of study;
- reviewed the forms of evaluation and the necessary time for preparing the answer by the students with disabilities;
- provided social scholarships and other material aids from the available funds;
- created some conditions for facilitating the access of the persons with disabilities in study blocks and other places, for the orientation in space (setting up ramps, access slopes);
- accommodated persons with different types of disability in student dorms in preferential conditions;
- organized the treatment of the disabled persons in the clinics of the university, etc.

At the same time, the actions taken are not sufficient for ensuring full access of the young people with disabilities to higher education and for achieving the UN Convention goal of promoting, protecting and ensuring the full and equal exercise by all the disabled persons of the fundamental human rights and liberties, as well as promoting the respect for their internal dignity.

Moreover, in the Republic of Moldova, at present, there is no higher education institution endowed with everything needed to include young people with different types and degrees of disability in the process of training. For this reason, people with disabilities have to choose their faculty and institution in which to study not so much according to their preferences but taking into account the conditions necessary for their own special educational requirements. This, in fact, indirectly leads to a serious compromise on the principle of non-obstruction of the right to education and the equal opportunities of young people with disabilities.

According to Institutional Strategies, in the next years of activity, the educational institutions are to take concrete measures in order to improve the access of young people with disabilities to higher education with adequate professional orientation.

People with disabilities must have equal chances to productive work and earning gains or employment in the labor market. In this respect, it is necessary to:

- make the existing labor market tools, schemes, modalities and training programmes, as well as measures for promoting employment accessible also to people with disabilities;
- apply, to the extent it is possible, the principle of freedom of choice with regard to vocational training and employment;
- encourage the person with disabilities and, if necessary his/her family or representative, to take part in all the measures undertaken for his/her professional orientation;
- approach the vocational training in the light of market economy principles;
- establish specialized support services for the integration of people with disabilities into work;
- design legal provisions as to actively support employers hiring people with disabilities in a real and profitable way;
- establish and actively promote social dialogue with companies, trade unions, NGOs on vocational training and employment of people with disabilities.

The implementation of the mentioned actions will make the integration of young people with disabilities in the academic environment and in the labor market more efficient, ensuring **equal** rights/opportunities in the field of vocational training **equally** with other citizens.

The equalization of chances will lead to the transformation of people with disabilities from persons of social assistance into ordinary citizens with rights and obligations.

REFERENCES

Socio-professional adaptation of people with mental disabilities, (1975). București: Editura Academiei.

Andronache N., Lapoșin E., (2016). *Theoretical and practical problems regarding the access of young people with disabilities to university studies. Accessibility of disabled young people to universities*, Chișinău: Pontos.

Communication of the European Commission, Bruxelles, 15.11.2010.

Racu S., Rusnac V., (2016). *Modern trends of national and international education. Educational and social inclusion of young people with disabilities to higher education*, Chişinău: Pontos.

Stempovschi E., Timuş A., (2017). *Students with disabilities in university education; Career retention and employment. Accessibility of disabled young people to universities*, Chişinău: Pontos.