

EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN ARMENIA: NEEDS AND BARRIERS

REPORT ON QUALITATIVE STUDY FINDINGS

2013

**Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment (LIFE)
for People with Disabilities Program and
Socioeconomic Reintegration Programme for Mine Victims in South Caucasus**



with funding from
Austrian
Development Cooperation





USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



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The Study was conducted within the framework of the “Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment (LIFE) for People with Disabilities” Program funded by the USAID and implemented by Save the Children and project “Socioeconomic Reintegration Programme for Mine Victims in South Caucasus” funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) with funds of Austrian Development Cooperation through ITF and implemented by IOM.

The opinions expressed in the Report are solely those of the author and do not necessarily coincide with those of US Government, USAID, Save the Children.

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Needless to say, the entire responsibility for any interpretations, ideas and conclusions concerning the findings rests entirely with the author.

The opinions and views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author, and do not necessarily coincide with or reflect those of the US Government, USAID, Save the Children, and IOM.

Vladimir Osipov

List of Acronyms

CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled Persons Organizations
EC	Employment Centers (local offices of SESA)
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LIFE	Livelihood Improvement through Fostered Employment for People with Disabilities (Program)
NSS	National Statistical Service
PWD	People with disabilities
RoA	Republic of Armenia
SESA	State Employment Service Agency
SMEA	Social-Medical Expertise Agency
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWD	Women with disabilities

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

There are 186,384 registered PWD in Armenia (as at the end of 2012)¹. Since the country's total population is 3,026,900², disability prevalence is 6.2%. The number of PWD is quite big for a small country like Armenia, considering the fact that this category includes only persons who were granted a disability group, i.e. persons with medium and severe forms of disability. *Because of a somewhat restrictive interpretation of disability*³ the persons with light and moderate forms of disability are not necessarily given a group of disability. Therefore, they are *not* granted a PWD status, *not* registered and *not* included in the official statistics. This approach to designating persons as disabled is still *de facto* based primarily upon a medical model and persons' ability to work, even though Armenia made a commitment to replace the medical model of disability with a social one.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Armenia has been making efforts, albeit not always consistent and well-coordinated, to address numerous problems faced by PWD, to improve their socioeconomic situation and to facilitate their integration into the mainstream society. It is particularly important because PWD constitute one of the most vulnerable among at-risk groups. Armenia was among the first post-Soviet States to adopt a law on social protection of PWD⁴. The law provided a definition of PWD: those are persons who need social assistance or protection because of limitations placed on their vital activities by mental or physical impairment⁵.

Protection of and guarantees for PWD in Armenia are also provided by the country's Constitution, Labor Code, Law on Employment of Population and Protection in Case of Unemployment, Law on Medical Care and Services to the Population, Law on State Pensions, Law on Education of Persons with Special Education Needs, Law on urban Development, and a number of other laws and Government Decrees.

In 2005, the Armenian Government approved the *National Strategy for Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Armenia for 2006-2015*, a comprehensive policy document that aims to integrate PWD into the Armenian society and to ensure their full participation in all aspects of public life. The Strategy outlined measures to address main PWD-related issues, including, *inter alia*, support to PWD education and employment, public awareness-raising

¹ Հայաստանի Հանրապետության սոցիալ-տնտեսական վիճակը 2013թ. հունվարին: Երևան, ԱՎԾ, 2013, էջ 87 (Socio-economic situation of the Republic of Armenia. January 2013. Yerevan: RoA NSS, 2013, p. 87, in Armenian).

² Հայաստանի Հանրապետության մշտական բնակչության թվաքանակը 2013 թվականի հունվարի 1-ի դրությամբ: Երևան, ԱՎԾ, 2013, էջ 3 (Permanent population of the Republic of Armenia as at 1 January 2013. Yerevan: NSS, 2013, p. 3, in Armenian).

³ The gap analysis of the projects implemented in the field of employment and professional education of people with disability in Armenia revealed that a major problem in the legal sphere is “related to the classification and criteria by which a person is qualified as PWD.” Gap Analysis. Projects Implemented in the Field of Employment and Professional of People with Disability in Armenia. Yerevan: Save the Children International – LIFE Program, 2012, p. 22.

⁴ Republic of Armenia Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disability in the Republic of Armenia (adopted on 14 April 1993).

⁵ Ibid, Article 2.

efforts, social partnership between governmental and non-governmental organizations, improved accessibility of all spheres of public life to PWD.

The Armenian Government's policy on disability became better focused and more effective after the signing (30 March 2007) and ratification (22 September 2010) of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*⁶. Currently the RoA *Law on protection of the rights of people with disabilities and their social inclusion in the Republic of Armenia*⁷ is being drafted in line with the international standards and principles.

In February 2008 the *National Commission on Issues of Persons with Disabilities* was set up to serve as a coordination mechanism on disabilities issues.

All those positive developments notwithstanding, PWD unemployment remains a major problem. The underlying causes of PWD unemployment are not new. Back in 1983, the ILO Convention No. 159 stressed that PWD prospects of securing, retaining and advancing in suitable employment are substantially reduced as a result of physical or mental impairment⁷. The unemployment rate among PWD in Armenia stands high at 92%, even though SESA has been implementing the PWD job placement programs and the Government has introduced a number of mechanisms (first of all, partial reimbursement of a disabled employee's wages⁸, and tax deductions), which are expected to act as incentives for employers to hire more PWD. While those efforts to encourage employers to hire PWD are commendable, they are still sadly inadequate and insufficient. A quota system, which is an effective policy tool and which could significantly improve the PWD employment situation, is currently non-existent⁹. It is unrealistic to expect that without special temporary measures it will be possible to improve the PWD employment situation given the *high unemployment rate* in the country, the *current state of the Armenian economy*, with an adverse impact of inconsistent policies, blockade, global economic crisis and lack of natural and financial resources, and the fact that PWD are affected disproportionately by lack of jobs. Women with disabilities (WWD) are a particularly vulnerable group. They are faced with even more formidable problems in the field of employment.

⁶ Republic of Armenia was among the first 82 countries that signed the CRPD upon its opening on 30 March 2007. On the same day Armenia also signed the Optional Protocol thereto (which has yet to be ratified).

⁷ ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention No. 159 (1983), Article I.

⁸ The RoA Government 13 July 2006 Decree # 996 that introduced partial compensation of PWD wages and thus provided an incentive to employers to hire and employ PWD was an important development in the field of PWD employment.

⁹ A recent ILO Report states: "The quota system for PWD's 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 PWD's. 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 placed in the new "Law on employment of population and social protection in case of unemployment" adopted in 2005." REPORT on vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Armenia. Yerevan: ILO, 2011, p. 18.

PWD employment is important for a number of reasons. Researchers stress that “with a lack of training and employment, PWDs end up relying on government pensions for their support.”¹⁰

The *National Report of the Republic of Armenia* on issues related to disability argues that “employment is one of the most important elements of social integration and self-reliance for people with disabilities.”¹¹

Jeffrey Tines and Daniela Buzducea point out that employment not only provides economic rewards and satisfies fundamental human needs of developing and enriching life but also provides opportunities to integrate persons with disabilities in the normal flow of life, in which social relationships are formed, social skills are developed and social status is confirmed¹².

PWD should not be perceived as merely a target group for charity. While they definitely need assistance and support with healthcare and social services, they should, nevertheless, be perceived as full citizens and should be empowered through, *inter alia*, their more active political, economic and citizen participation, with expansion of economic opportunities (including employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship) being one of the most effective avenues for policy interventions.

Therefore, even though PWD social integration and assistance programs are crucial, as are provision of affordable, low-cost but high-quality medical and social services (including transportation facilities, etc.), their employment is a core issue in more ways than just one.

As the quotes above indicated, employment is not just one of the best channels for social integration. It is also the most important tool for improving their living standards, ensuring upward social mobility and, thus, a higher socioeconomic status. This factor cannot be overestimated because poverty rate among PWD is disproportionately higher than in the society at large and among other social groups. Improving access of vulnerable groups, including PWD, to employment is among the most effective keys to the solution of their multiple problems. It is also noteworthy that economic participation is among major factors conducive to their citizen and political participation as they become more self-reliant and self-confident and more engaged in the affairs both of local community and of the society at large. The government policies have, therefore, to focus on PWD employment-promoting strategies as one of the top priorities.

To address some of those issues the qualitative study of major aspects of PWD employment was developed and implemented by LIFE Program of *Save the Children* in collaboration with the IOM Armenia Office in December 2012 – April 2013.

¹⁰ Gap Analysis. Projects Implemented in the Field of Employment and Professional Education of People with Disability in Armenia. Yerevan: Save the Children International – LIFE Program, 2012, p. 7.

¹¹ “Հայաստանի Հանրապետությունում հաշմանդամության հիմնախնդիրների վերաբերյալ”: Ազգային Զեկույց: Երևան, 2011թ., էջ 15 (On issues related to disability in the Republic of Armenia. National Report. Yerevan, 2011, p. 15, in Armenian).

¹² Transitions Towards an Inclusive Future: Vocational Skills Development and Employment Options for Persons with Disabilities in Europe & Eurasia (by Jeffrey Tines and Daniela Buzducea). Washington, D.C.: USAID, October 2009, p. 47.

The Goal and Objectives of the Study

One of the main principles of effective public policy formulation, particularly in a modern democratic polity, is some form of participation of beneficiaries in the decision-making that directly affects them. One way is to hear PWD voices directly, voices that are usually not heard. And that is the *raison d'être* of the present study.

The goal of the study is to identify PWD employment needs and barriers to PWD employment. The rationale behind the study is that its findings will help policy-makers make better-informed choices in formulating policies that aim to improve the employment situation for PWD by, *inter alia*, removing barriers to employment, changing societal attitudes and perceptions and taking other pro-active measures to better address PWD employment needs. The study was conceived as a baseline assessment of the said needs and barriers.

The overall objectives of the study are:

- Ñ **to study** attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers¹³ to PWD employment
- Ñ **to identify** PWD priority employment needs as ranked in their perceptions
- Ñ **to examine** pros and contras of tentative policy changes and to weigh their possible consequences
- Ñ **to identify** differences and commonalities in the core issues perceptions by sampled PWD and by landmine victims as a specific subset of that group, and
- Ñ **to explore** a gender dimension of all the issues addressed in the study

The specific objectives of the study are:

- Ñ **to provide** new insights into the underlying factors of the current PWD employment situation
- Ñ **to expand** the existing knowledge base regarding the core issues covered by the study
- Ñ **to identify** effective strategies and positive factors in job search and retention
- Ñ **to explore** perceived consequences of PWD participation in TVET programs
- Ñ **to examine** reasons why PWD would or would not turn to someone for assistance in job search
- Ñ **to assess** the impact that several entities can make on improving PWD employment situation
- Ñ **to estimate** the extent to which PWD make use or are aware of the programs implemented by SESA to support and promote PWD employment
- Ñ **to identify** colleagues' attitudes to employed PWD through the latter's perceptions
- Ñ **to understand** PWD perspectives on measures to remove barriers to their employment
- Ñ **to determine** factors that motivate or de-motivate PWD to engage in self-employment and entrepreneurship and to identify perceived barrier to starting a business, and

¹³ For a concise description and explanation of attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers faced by PWD see: *The Prevalence of Disability in Europe & Eurasia. Final Report* (by Cara Galbraith). Washington, D.C.: USAID, September 2009, p. 5.

to **investigate** employers' and EC representatives' perceptions on several of core issues addressed by the study.

The findings of this study are intended for policy-makers, government entities and international and domestic organizations dealing with PWD issues, especially with employment-related issues, as well as for researchers and all those who are concerned with the issues of PWD employment.

The research questions were framed according to the study goal and objectives.

While the study of this scope and format cannot arguably produce conclusive answers, yet there are grounds to believe that some definitive answers can be obtained.

Methodology

The qualitative study was conceived and implemented within the framework of applied policy research and was conducted through a survey that focused on perspectives and perceptions of three main stockholders in the PWD employment equation, viz. the “supply end” (PWD, including landmine victims), the “demand end” (employers) and “mediators/service providers” (EC representatives).

To address the PWD employment issues in a comprehensive and meaningful manner a study, regardless of its scale, has to encompass at least the following three broad areas: (i) PWD employment needs and aspirations against the background of socioeconomic realities and existing opportunities, (ii) work place physical and psychological conditions and a wider social environment, including societal attitudes and perceptions, and (iii) policy measures.

(a) Sample

Since the study focused on the perspectives of the three main actors/stakeholders in the employment field, viz. (i) PWDs as actual or potential employees, (ii) employers (who are primary decision-makers in hiring, retaining and firing employees) and (iii) EC representatives (as mediators/service providers), three separate samples were created.

Two *convenience*, non-probability samples were created for key informants, viz. employers and EC representatives.

Employers

The first sample included 9 randomly selected employers from 5 cities in 4 regions of Armenia (Artashat/Ararat, Gyumri / Shirak, Alaverdi and Vanadzor / Lori and Gavar / Gegharkunik)¹⁴ and from the capital city of Yerevan. They were drawn from the lists of large and medium size businesses in the spheres of production and services. The sphere of their operation and the number of employees (including PWD) broken down by sex are shown in the table below.

¹⁴ These are the “program marzes,” i.e. the regions where the LIFE program is implemented.

Sphere	Number of Employees			Number of PWD employees		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Service/TV	5	8	13	0	1	1
Service/IT	8	21	29	0	0	0
Service	259	261	520	5	2	7
Service	2	3	5	0	0	0
Service	4	4	8	0	0	0
Service	10	5	15	0	0	0
Production	88	568	656	2	31	33
Production	105	30	135	1	1	2
bank	11	4	15	0	0	0
Total	492	904	1,396	8	35	43

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality each employer was randomly assigned a single-letter code (from “A” through “I”), which does not match the sequence on the list in the above table. Once assigned, the code was consistently used for the designated respondent throughout the text (in the “Findings” section below).

EC representatives

The second sample included 6 EC representatives from the same 4 cities in 4 regions of Armenia (Artashat/Ararat, Gyumri / Shirak, Vanadzor / Lori and Gavar / Gegharkunik) and from the capital city of Yerevan. One representative from an Employment Center in each region and two representatives from Yerevan were interviewed. The number of registered PWD, the number of PWD placed in a job within the past 12 months, the total number of employees in EC, including the number of PWD employees (all broken down by sex) are shown in the table below¹⁵.

¹⁵ The data was kindly provided by SESA, as at 31 December 2012

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City	Number of Registered PWD/ Total Number of Registered Job Seekers			PWD placed in a job within the past 12 months			Number of employees in EC	Number of PWD employees in EC		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Total	Women	Men	Total
Gavar	7/3,633	5/1,895	12/5,528	4	3	7	8	1	0	1
Artashat	30/2,362	7/901	37/3,263	1	3	4	8	0	0	0
Vanadzor	15/5,924	11/2,423	26/8,347	2	.	2	12	1	2	3
Yerevan Nor Nork	20/1,441	14/503	34/1,944	4	11	15	8	1	0	1
Yerevan Kentron- Marash	19/1,367	19/523	38/1,890	3	2	5	8	1	0	1
Gyumri	135/6,782	113/2,560	248/9,342	8	3	11	21	0	1	1
Total	226/21,509	169/8,805	395/30,314	22	22	44	65	4	3	7

As in case of employers, with a view to ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, each EC was randomly assigned a single-letter code as to its region (and, additionally, an administrative district in case of Yerevan)(from “A” through “F”), which does not match the sequence on the list in the above table. Once assigned, the code was consistently used for the designated respondent throughout the text (in the “Findings” section below).

PWD

Since the principal target population is PWD, the main selection criterion was disability. The sampled population was then stratified by sex, age, group of disability and region of residence. The sample population was also disaggregated by type of disability, marital status and employment status. Taking into account that the employment needs of Armenian landmine victims were not yet explored adequately they were included as a specific group (subset) in the sample.

The effort was made to bring the proportions in the sample as close as possible to those in the target population according to some crucial background characteristics¹⁶.

¹⁶ E.g. Out of 186,384 registered PWD in Armenia 98,965 men and 87,419 women, i.e. 53% and 47% respectively. In the survey sample the percentages were 52% and 48% respectively. The same holds true for age groups, types and groups of disability. 18-40-year-old PWD constitute 22% and 41-63-year-olds constitute 78% among the total PWD population in Armenia, whereas their percentages in the survey sample are 26% and 74% respectively. In the total PWD population the percentage of those in the I, II and III groups of disability are about 6%, 40% and 52% and in the survey sample the percentages are 8%, 42% and 50% respectively.

Purposive sampling was used to maximize variation of perceptions based on individual experiences and demographic characteristics.

According to the qualitative studies experts¹⁷, a sample size of 50 respondents is needed to discover perceptions with an incidence as low as 10% of the target population and to reduce the risk of missing that subgroup to less than 1%, thereby ensuring 99% of confidence¹⁸. Thus, 50 respondents (including 10 landmine victims) were selected equally from the above-mentioned areas of residence. They were from the same 4 cities in 4 regions and from the capital city of Yerevan.

The sample was drawn from the PWD databases maintained by DPOs, Ministries and international organizations. The accuracy of provided data on PWD, i.e. their addresses and telephone numbers, was checked, and availability and consent of those people for the interview was obtained prior to field work. Even though PWD (and especially landmine victims) are not an easy-to-reach group, when interviewers finally reached them, they were willing to answer the interview questions, thus ensuring the response rate of 100%.

The following categories were used as main demographic characteristics of PWD respondents:

sex (male-female), **age group** (18-35, 36-45, 46-55 and 56-63-year-old), **area of residence (city/region)** (Artashat /Ararat, Gyumri /Shirak, Vanadzor/Lori, Gavar/Gegharkunik and Yerevan), **type of disability** (visual impairment (vision disability), hearing impairment/disability, medical disabilities and mobility & physical impairment/ locomotor disability), **group of disability** (I, II and III), **marital status** (single/unmarried, married, married but separated, widow/widower and divorced), **household composition** (PWD lives: alone, with spouse, child(ren), parent(s), sibling(s), (an)other relative(s) and other (living with grandchildren)), **level of education** (basic secondary education, comprehensive secondary education, technical and vocational education, and higher education), **type of housing** (single-family detached home or apartment in a multi-unit residential building), **gross household monthly income** (<25,000; 25,001-40,000; 40,001-80,000; 80,001-120,000 and >120,000 AMD), **sources of household income** (paid job, one's own (private) business self-employed, real estate/property for rent, land plot for rent, pension disability benefit unemployment benefit, family benefit, aid from relatives and/or friends, money sent from a relative who is a work migrant abroad and other) and **employment status** (paid employee, entrepreneur, self-employed, unemployed, housewife, student, pensioner).

¹⁷ See, e.g., DePaulo, Peter. "Sample size for qualitative research". *QUIRK'S Marketing Research Review*, December 2000. <http://www.quirks.com/articles/a2000/20001202.aspx>

¹⁸ The experts point out, however, that we need to remember that those percents express "the confidence in uncovering a qualitative insight - as opposed to the usual quantitative notion of "confidence" in estimating a proportion or mean plus or minus the measurement error." Ibid.

Basic demographic profile of PWD respondents

Variable	Response category	n (number of respondents)
Sex	Female	24
	Male	26
Age group	18-35-year-old	8
	36-45-year-old	9
	46-55-year-old	9
	56-63-year-old	24
Area of residence (city/region)	Artashat /Ararat	10
	Gyumri / Shirak	10
	Vanadzor / Lori	10
	Gavar / Gegharkunik	10
	Yerevan	10
Type of disability	visual impairment (vision disability)	8
	hearing impairment/disability	4
	medical disabilities	22
	mobility & physical impairment/ locomotor disability	16
Group of disability	I	4
	II	21
	III	25
Marital status	single/unmarried	5
	married	39
	married but separated	-
	widow/widower	5
	divorced	1
In the household lives (with)*	alone	4
	spouse	38
	child(ren)	38
	parent(s)	13
	sibling(s)	7
	(an)other relative(s)	7
	Other (living with grandchildren)	4

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Highest educational qualification obtained	basic secondary education	5
	comprehensive secondary education	12
	technical and vocational education	19
	higher education	14
Type of housing	single-family detached home	14
	apartment in a multi-unit residential building	36
Gross household monthly income (AMD)	<25000	2
	25001-40000	10
	40001-80000	19
	80001-120000	9
	>120000	9
	Don't know/not sure	1
Sources of household income*	1. paid job	28
	2. private business	5
	3. self-employed	1
	4. real estate/property for rent	0
	5. land plot for rent	0
	6. pension	23
	7. disability benefit	24
	8. unemployment benefit	0
	9. family benefit	5
	10. aid from relatives and/or friends	6
	11. money sent from a relative who is a work migrant abroad	5
Employment status of surveyed PWD	paid employee	13
	entrepreneur	1
	self-employed	1
	unemployed	21
	housewife	12
	student	1
	pensioner	1

* The total adds up to more than 50 because it was a multiple-choice question and respondents could choose more than one response. *Note: the data include sources of income of all household members.*

(b) Data collection methods

The present study is an empirically-grounded research. The data collection method was an interview method (an in-depth structured interview in case of PWD and a structured key informant interview in case of employers and EC representatives).

Three survey instruments, the questionnaires, were drawn up, one for each group of respondents. In line with the logic and objectives of this qualitative study, the survey instrument for PWD (containing 37 questions) included, besides the standard demographic questions (descriptive information about the respondent), 4 main categories of questions, viz. contextual, diagnostic, evaluative and strategic¹⁹. As to the types of questions, most of them were open-ended, several were partial open-ended questions and few were close-ended questions, including multiple choice questions, and ratio scale questions.

While the questionnaire for PWD included demographic and personal information, it did not contain sensitive or controversial questions that might confuse, discomfort or antagonize and alienate the respondents.

The survey instruments for employers and EC representatives did not include demographic information. Those questionnaires consisted of 4 close-ended questions and 8 open-ended questions in the *strategic* and *evaluative* categories.

All 3 groups of respondents (PWD, employers and EC representatives) were interviewed by interview moderators for between 25-40 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents. The recorded interviews were then transcribed into computer files, submitted to the project coordinator and printed out. Prior to each interview, interview moderators assured the respondents that strict confidentiality would be maintained and that none of them would be identifiable in the published report. After the interview recordings were checked and compared with the transcribed files they were destroyed.

To conduct a pre-test of the survey instruments they were circulated among key stakeholders, including EC and other relevant State entities, experts from Save the Children, IOM and DPOs. The feedback was positive and constructive recommendations were instrumental in finalizing the questionnaires. The PWD questionnaire was administered also to several individuals from the target group. The pre-test demonstrated that the questions and response categories and their wording **(after final revision) are appropriate and relevant and that they adequately cover the areas under study.**

¹⁹ **Contextual** questions seek to identify the form and nature of what exists (e.g. “*What needs does the population of the study have?*”), **diagnostic** questions aim to examine the reasons for, or causes of, what exists (e.g. “*What factors underlie particular attitudes or perceptions?*”), **evaluative** questions try to appraise the effectiveness of what exists (e.g. “*What barriers exist to systems operating?*”) and **strategic** questions focus on identifying new theories, policies, plans or actions (e.g. “*What types of services are required to meet needs?*”). See: Ritchie, Jane and Liz Spencer. “Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research.” *Analyzing qualitative data* /Edited by Alan Bryman and Robert G. Burgess. London & New York, 2002, p. 174.

(c) Data analysis methods

The framework with a traditional method for qualitative research data analysis was used. It was along the lines of the grounded theory approach²⁰ with an exclusive focus on a comparative analysis of the survey data without explicitly relying on any preconceived hypotheses. The standard analytical strategies (such as selection, interpretation and abstraction) were applied to convert primary data into consequential research findings that could be meaningfully used for policy formulation purposes.

The aim was to identify the categories that span across shared experiences and perceptions and reveal common themes, trends and patterns. It should be noted, however, that the questionnaires incorporated, nevertheless, some hypotheses, albeit implicitly, which were then tested in the course of the study.

The ideas, opinions and views reflected in the interview transcripts were read and coded by the researcher. To provide coherence to the sets of data so as to structure them for subsequent analysis the series of codes were extracted from the interview texts. Those were then applied to generate concepts-based categories through the abstraction and conceptualization process. The categories were subsequently used via indexing and thematic charting to describe and analyze the phenomena in the text. Whenever possible, the same categories were used to make more meaningful comparisons between the views of various groups and subsets of the respondents. Given the goal and objectives of the study, the focus was on mapping the range of the PWD employment needs and of the barriers to PWD employment and on providing explanations whenever possible and appropriate with a view to helping decision-makers formulate more effective policies and develop long-range strategies to better address the problems and issues covered by the study.

Since gender is a key dimension, its exploration entails a gender analysis of the issues addressed by the study. Gender analysis aims to reveal a differential impact made on female and male PWD by various factors, such as current *situation* and *practices*, prevalent *perceptions* (including stereotypes), *policy interventions*, and *legislation*.

To that end the views and assessments made by the PWD respondents of both sexes were to be compared and a considerable number of questions were included into the questionnaires for 3 groups of the respondents (PWD, employers and EC representatives) to assess whether various factors affect female and male PWD differently (and if yes, to what extent) and to try to identify the underlying causes as well as consequences for the two sexes.

Accordingly, three units of analysis were used, viz. a PWD, an employer and an EC representative.

The outcome of the conceptual interpretation of the data generated by the survey is presented below in the “Findings and Discussion” section.

²⁰ While systematic methodology of the grounded theory approach was used in this study, the ultimate goal did not include discovery, generation or formulation of a theory.

II. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Surveyed Companies & EC: PWD Problems at a Glance

POSITIONS HELD BY PWD IN SURVEYED COMPANIES

The total number of employees in 9 companies covered by this study is 1,396 (including 492 women and 904 men). Only 3 companies had PWD employees. The total number of PWD employees is 43, including 8 women and 35 men. The size of company and the sphere of their operation seem to be factors determining the likelihood of PWD employment. Thus, the bigger the company, the more likely it will have PWD employees. Companies with 5, 8, 15 or 29 employees did not have PWD in their staff, whereas companies with 135, 520 or 656 employees did have them. The sector of the economy where those companies operate matters even more than the company's size. Thus, in the services sector there are few PWD employees, if at all, whereas in the production sector PWD have a much better chance of employment. A company in the service sector with 520 employees had only 7 PWD employees, while a company in the production sector with 656 employees had 33 PWD employees. It should be noted, however, that male PWD are almost exclusively employed in the production sector, while most female PWD are employed in the service sector.

Almost all PWD in those companies are blue collar workers or hold similar low-level positions. In the production sector PWD men are employed predominantly as laborers. Only 2 men held positions of a higher level. One was employed as a subforeman and the other as an economist. Women were employed as lab assistants, packagers and inspectors.

In the service sector, it is a mobile phone operator company that had PWD employees. All of them, both women and men, worked primarily in registration activation, outbound call and sales teams.

Since twice as many companies in this small sample of employers did not have PWD employees as those that did, it may also be useful to look into the reasons why there are no PWD staff members in those companies.

ROOT CAUSES FOR NOT HIRING PWD

The 6 companies in this study with no PWD employees provided a number of reasons why they do not have them.

According to two interviewed employers:

"No PWD has ever applied to the company for a position."

Employers "G" and "H"

Lack of professional qualifications, including knowledge and relevant experience and skills, seems to be one of the major factors impeding PWD employment, according to several employers. As one of them put it:

“PWD do not have necessary experience and qualifications to be employed in a specific sector .”

Employer “A”

This view is seconded by another employer, who points at specialized skills as a prerequisite for employment. Thus,

“Only those people who know certain computer software can work in the company.”

Employer “B”

Disability is also seen as an impeding factor. One employer’s company operates in the field where they deal with customers directly, therefore

“If employees are blind or mute or do not have a limb, it will be difficult for them to do the work.”

Employer “G”

According to another employer:

“The company has a position that requires doing quite a lot of walking, which a PWD can hardly be able to do.”

Employer “B”

On the other hand, while some companies do not have PWD employees, they would consider hiring them provided the latter have necessary skills for jobs and their disability does not interfere with adequate performance of the functions in the job description. As one interviewed employer put it:

“We do not have PWD but we could hire them for positions that require sitting and working on computer or having a good ear for music.”

Employer “D”

The sixth employer said that while their company does not have PWD employees, they help PWD find employment by providing 2- to 3-month-long professional training. In the words of that employer: “proved very useful for PWD” (Employer “I”).

“That training proved very useful for PWD.”

Employer “I”

PRIVILEGES GRANTED BY LEGISLATION TO PWD

Armenian legislation grants certain privileges to working PWD. When asked, if employed PWD make use of those privileges, the employers, who were interviewed in the course of this survey, gave the following answers.

It is noteworthy that only one of the 6 employers whose companies do not have PWD employees answered that question in the affirmative. One was not certain:

“It is hard to say.”

Employer “A”

while 4 others answered in the negative. The main reason mentioned by the 3 of them was lack of knowledge on the part of PWD. Those respondents believed that

“Many PWD do not know their rights, privileges and advantages and therefore they do not make use of them.”

Employers “D,” “G” and “H”

In one respondent’s view,

“It is employers who lack knowledge.”

Employer “B”

While the last respondent in the group of employers whose companies do not have PWD employees answered the question in the affirmative, it was with reservations. The PWD use of the privileges granted to them by the Armenian legislation was seen in this case as predicated on their having relevant information. In the words of this employer:

“If PWD are aware of the privileges granted to them by legislation, then, I think, they make use of those privileges.”

Employer “I”

All three employers who have PWD employees said that the latter do make use of the privileges granted to them by the Armenian legislation. While one of them was very laconic and simply said that

“PWD make full use” [of the privileges]

Employer “E”

without further elaborating on the subject, another respondent not only seconded that opinion but also added that

“The PWD working in our company pay fewer taxes than non-disabled people.”

Employer “F”

The third respondent in that subgroup contended that while privileges are indeed granted to PWD,

“They are granted not by the legislation but by the employer on his own initiative.”

Employer “C”

To illustrate that point the respondent spoke about their company where the trade union gives sanatorium vouchers to PWD for free.

Since lack of knowledge and awareness is seen as an obstacle to PWD enjoyment of the privileges granted to them by the Armenian legislation, the situation can be improved with measures aimed to raise their awareness as well as that of employers.

PWD REGISTRATION IN EC: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Two EC representatives said that there are no problems with PWD registration in Employment Centers (EC officials in regions “C” and “E”); what is more, PWD do not need to stand in line, as they are served first.

Three EC representatives pointed out the lack of physical access for persons with mobility and physical impairment, especially for PWD in wheelchairs (EC representatives in regions “B”, “D” and “F”). Some Employment Centers are located in upper floors of buildings and there are no ramps in those buildings. When there is an elevator in the building, it is not always in service because there is no operator. That is the reason why many PWDs cannot or would not come to Employment Centers for registration. However, the law requires that to be registered they have to come to the Employment center in person.

These EC representatives argue that their staff members do their best to help PWD and to solve the problem of physical accessibility of their offices. When necessary, they operate the elevator. In other cases they come down to the ground floor and register PWD there. Sometimes, when PWD declare that they want to register, EC staff members visit them to provide assistance.

Another problem is closely related to the first one. It is a problem of transportation. In this particular instance it was transportation to the Social-Medical Expertise Agency (SMEA). According to the EC representatives, their Center acts in such cases as an intermediary trying to help PWD.

The third major problem is unwillingness of PWDs to come to Employment Centers (EC representatives in regions “B” and “F”). According to them, it is very difficult to get PWD to come to Employment Centers for registration. PWD are hopeless and therefore they do not want to come to Employment Centers and to get involved in programs. They are aware that it is difficult to get a job for them and to convince an employer to hire PWD. In any case, there are few vacancies and, as a rule, PWD are at a disadvantage. Not surprisingly

PWD take a passive stance and lack initiative, especially those of them who have interaction and psychological problems. At the same time, the root cause can be the lack of awareness and relevant information.

To address this problem the Employment Centers use various strategies, including staff member visits, proper information and notification of PWD of vacancies, close contacts with employers, asking SMEA's help in referring PWD (who have been granted a disability group there) to Employment Centers, etc.

EC offices should be moved to ground floors of the buildings or, at least, the buildings with EC offices should have ramps and properly operating elevators.

Barriers to PWD Employment

PWD VIEWS

In order to be able to formulate and pursue effective PWD employment policies it is important to identify main barriers to PWD employment. Respondents in the PWD sample were presented with 12 possible barriers to employment and an opportunity to specify other barriers. It was a multiple-choice question: respondents could select as many relevant options as they saw fit. It is noteworthy that **health problems** were rated as the single most significant barrier. This factor was noted by over a half of the respondents (31). The second largest reported barrier is **lack of jobs** (25). The next most often cited barrier is **employers' unwillingness to hire** disabled people (16). While **age** can, in the estimation of some respondents, be a barrier to PWD employment, it is noteworthy that all the respondents who think so (7) are in the pre-retirement age bracket (57-62-year-olds).

The findings of this study tend to indicate that in terms of significance the first 3 factors outweigh by far a number of factors that are usually seen as formidable obstacles encountered by PWD trying to get or maintain a job. It is quite unexpected that very few respondents mentioned **lack of accessible transportation** (5), problems with **physical accessibility** of buildings and streets (lack of wheelchair ramps, elevators, curb ramps, audible traffic signals etc.)(4), **lack of accommodation** in the work place (4) and **public attitudes** (2).

Very few respondents reported **lack of sufficient information on available vacancies** (4) and **lack or poor State support** (5). Likewise, **access to computer** and **the internet** is not a problem at all.

Not infrequently, the PWD **lack of adequate education and skills** figures prominently in PWD employment studies conducted in various countries. In this study, however, this is not a factor, at least from the perspective of the disabled people themselves, as only 4 of them mentioned it.

Time and again PWD NGOs and international organizations in this country voice their concerns about the disability conclusions given by Social-Medical Expert Commissions (SMEA). It is a well-documented fact that while granting a group of disability, the SMEA

usually places undue constraints on possible areas and types of work for PWD in question thereby significantly limiting their chances to get a job. Therefore it is very surprising and even counterintuitive that **none** of the respondents in the sample chose to note that factor, even when prompted.

It should be noted that there are some differences in women's and men's perceptions of the above-mentioned barriers.

It is worth looking first of all into how a gender perspective plays out with regard to the three barriers seemed the most significant by respondents.

Concerning the **lack of jobs**, there is unanimity of views. Exactly a half of male and of female respondents regarded it as a major obstacle.

As regards the two other barriers, there is a marked difference between the proportion of men and women holding the views in question. While only a half of women PWD saw health problems as a main obstacle, among men PWD the number of those who thought so exceeded 2.7 times the number of those who did not (think so).

The difference is even more pronounced in case of views on employers' unwillingness to hire disabled people. While among male respondents the number of those who see employers' unwillingness as a major barrier is only 1.4 smaller than that the number of those who take an opposite view, among female respondents who find employers' unwilling as a major factor is almost 4 times smaller than the number of those who do not think so.

In general, across the board, a higher proportion of men than women tend to choose the listed factors as obstacles. It can, probably, be accounted for by the fact that men are more active job-seekers than women, who have an option of becoming a homemaker (a role not necessarily chosen entirely freely but still regarded as a proper one by the society at large). Unless severely disabled, men can hardly afford opting out because of inadequate disability allowances (which are lower than the minimum living standards) and because of internalized social expectations.

As regards the prevalence of views concerning the barriers to PWD employment, **landmine victims** as a specific subset of respondents stand out only in case of 4 factors, which are of lesser importance at that. As regards the major factor, there is virtually no difference of opinion among landmine victims and other respondents. Some differences can be observed with regard to perceptions of the *absent or poor State support* and *lack of accessible transportation*. In both cases every 3rd surveyed landmine victim, while only every 10th respondent in the overall sample noted those factors as a major barrier.

Likewise, the proportion of those who mentioned *physical accessibility* of buildings and streets as a barrier to PWD employment is higher among LM victims (2 out of 10) than in the general sample (4 out of 50).

Interestingly enough, LM victims are the only group in the sample that pointed at the PWD *lack of adequate education and skills* as a barrier.

De-motivating factors: The above-mentioned and, possibly, other barriers may, in all likelihood, act as de-motivating factors that affect PWD seeking employment or considering doing that. It is noteworthy that only 8 out of 21 unemployed PWD in the sample and only 1 out of 12 housewives (who are only nominally *not* unemployed) applied for a suitable job or turned to some person or entity for assistance in getting such job. Out of 13 unemployed PWD only 2 do not want to work (none of the 11 housewives who had not applied for a job said she did not want to work).

The main reason cited by both groups for not looking for a job was **health problems** (8 unemployed PWD and 7 PWD housewives):

“I do not see any suitable job for my health status ...”

35-year-old male (unemployed) respondent from Artashat

“My health status prevents me from working.”

59 year-old female respondent (housewife) from Artashat

The second reason, which is, in their view, significantly less important is the **absence of suitable jobs in their community** (4 and 2 respectively). In the words of one respondent:

“I do not see any suitable job for me in our society.”

40-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

A few other factors such as **favoritism, age** and a **general lack of jobs** were also mentioned:

“To get a job one should turn to the Regional Governor, even if it is a position of a watchman.”

57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

“Difficulties in finding a job are related to age ... An older person does not stand a chance.”

59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

“I do not apply ... because it is useless ... In the past I applied to different companies ... but was rejected fused because of ... the absence of jobs.”

62 year-old male respondent from Artashat

It should be noted that none of the 28 respondents in the sample who did not look for a job mentioned *lack of relevant education/skills, interpersonal communication problems, employers’ unwillingness to hire PWD or inaccessible environment* as reasons why they were not engaged in a job search.

* * *

Based on these findings, there are grounds to conclude that alongside health problems PWD noted a whole range of barriers to their employment with **lack of jobs** and **employers' unwillingness to hire PWD** topping the list. It can also be concluded that not all PWD are adequately informed.

Therefore, policy-makers and practitioners in the field should be aware of the factors thus rated and should give them more consideration in their policies and practices. The persisting problems of *lack of jobs* and *employers' unwillingness to hire PWD* should prompt policy-makers on the one hand to enhance programs benefitting employers by compensating wages for non-competitive groups and on the other hand to design and implement targeted programs of job creation for PWD. The latter are of particular significance because they allow more effective interventions and control. These efforts should be complemented by PWD awareness-raising initiatives. A point can be made that while the improvement of PWD health is a worthy objective in and of itself, it is also an added value in terms of employment prospects.

* * *

PWD were also asked to indicate measures that can contribute to the removal of the barriers to PWD employment discussed above. Since it was a multiple-choice question and respondents could select as many relevant options as they saw fit, the responses rank those measures by efficiency and demonstrate respondents' preferences. The top priority is setting quotas for PWD, i.e. guaranteed provision of a certain number of jobs. (20 respondents favored this option). It is followed by changes in legislation that would favor PWD employment. (This option was selected by 16 respondents). Considering the fact that introduction of quotas is done through legislation, it can be concluded that legislative changes are seen as the most effective measure by a large majority of interviewed PWD. The second most effective group of measures includes *support* to be given by NGOs or other organizations (to advocate for and protect PWD rights) (14), *PWD awareness-raising* (13) and *special State programs for securing jobs* for PWD, including through retraining and job placement (11).

These are followed by provision of *long-term incentives* for employers, such as tax breaks and partial compensation of PWD wages (9), a *change in public attitudes* towards PWD issues (8) and programs promoting *PWD entrepreneurship* (8). Provision of *appropriate working conditions* and *strengthening links between rehabilitation and retraining centers and employers* are measures that garnered least support from PWD (6 each).

Respondents could expand the list of measures. All in all, 12 additional measures were proposed. Those include, inter alia, lower taxes, change in employers' attitudes, provision of low-interest loans, development of PWD entrepreneur skills, establishment of PWD centers, social integration of PWD, good governance, assistance to PWD to become independent, elimination of discrimination on the grounds of age and appearance and creation of undemanding jobs for PWD. These measures, however, did not earn popular support as each one of them was backed only by one respondent.

According to the survey data, women made twice as many additions (8) as men (4). Measures proposed by men are all along the lines of increasing self-sufficiency and enhancing social roles of PWD, viz. lower taxes, good governance, development of PWD entrepreneur skills and social integration of PWD. Women speak from a more passive position of a beneficiary of social support measures.

As regards measures on the original list, it is noteworthy that women's and men's views for the most part coincide. When they don't, the numbers are, nevertheless, too small compared to the number of women and men who answered the same question in the negative. For example, 9 men and 5 women mentioned NGO support as an important measure, so there is obviously some difference; at the same time, however, 17 men and 19 women do not regard that support as an effective measure. The same holds true for a change in public attitudes, where the numbers are 6 and 2 vs. 20 and 22 respectively.

Only two measures can be seen as somewhat special cases (even though the above caveat applies): one is the programs promoting PWD entrepreneurship, with only men regarding it as a measure; and the other one is special State programs for securing jobs for PWD, which were deemed an important measure by 9 men and only 2 women.

It is also noteworthy that as a group, landmine victims place their trust in the ability of the listed measures to contribute to the elimination of barriers to PWD employment to considerably greater extent (2-2.5 times more, on the average) than other subsets in the sample or the entire sample. Out of 10 landmine victims in the sample from 2 to 6 supported one of those measures, without exception. The most efficient measure in their view is changes in legislation (6 landmine victims favored that option). The second best measure is programs promoting PWD entrepreneurship (5), followed by quotas, special State programs for securing jobs for PWD, a change in public attitudes towards PWD issues and support given by NGOs (4). They find provision of appropriate working conditions, long-term incentives for employers and PWD awareness-raising slightly

less attractive (3 each). Only 2 landmine victims regard strengthening links between rehabilitation and retraining centers and employers as an effective measure.

It should be borne in mind that while these numbers might seem modest, the landmine victims constitute an impressively large share of the respondents who favor these measures (5 of 8, 3 of 6, 4 of 8, 4 of 11, etc.). The data clearly indicate that even though this is the group severely affected by disability (all its members have, as a minimum, physical and mobility impairment) and thus is among the most vulnerable and socially excluded, it nevertheless takes a very active stance on PWD employment issues and is eager to contribute to progress in that field.

* * *

Those were the perceptions on what experts in the field call the “supply end” of the employment equation. No less important are the views on the demand side of that equation (i.e. employers) and the reading of the situation by the mediating structures (i.e. Employment Centers). Therefore the same questions were given to EC and employers but in a different format, as an open-ended question.

EMPLOYERS’ VIEWS

The question of barriers to PWD employment was formulated in this case as factors that impede hiring/recruitment of PWD by employers so that the latter would primarily rely on their own experience, while at the same time focusing on the situation in the private sector in general or their specific sub-sector. The barriers identified by interviewed employers are quite numerous and diverse and encompass factors ranging from relatively objective to subjective to implicitly discriminatory.

Objective factors include:

- **prohibition by law** because of strenuous, fatiguing or dangerous labor and a mandatory medical examination that PWD cannot pass,

“Under the law, only those who passed medical examination can be hired here. ... Once a year all employees undergo a mandatory prophylactic medical examination to see if they can work or not. It is because production ... entails strenuous and dangerous labor.”

Employer “C”

- **nature of work and occupation,**

“It depends on the organization and occupation. It also depends on the nature of work...”

Employer “H”

- **type of disability**

“Mental disability poses a problem for an employer...” ...

Employer “I”

- **prospects of problems** with dismissing PWD when their qualifications and quality of performance are inadequate

“If employer hires PWD and PWD do not perform up to the mark, it would be difficult to dismiss them.”

Employer “A”.

These findings indicate that some employers believe that they and their peers can do little about these “objective” factors. They try to convey the impression that in other cases PWD do not encounter obstacles:

“If company needs specialists, it will hire them, even if they are PWD.”

Employer “H”

Another employer sounds no less optimistic:

“Physical disability is not a problem, especially if PWD are smart. It would be a pity not to use their potential.”

Employer “I”

Subjective factors include:

- **absence of good will on the part of employers, particularly unwillingness to deal with the issues related to physical accessibility and adaptation of workplaces:**

“It is primarily an issue of adaptation of work places.” Employer “E”

“Not every PWD can work in our company because of the stairs at the entrance.” Employer “B”

“The problem is mobility and adaptation of the workplace.” Employer “I”

While ensuring physical accessibility may indeed be a costly and, at times, challenging undertaking, it should be borne in mind, however, that the government allocates money for improving physical accessibility and adaptation of work places. There are also donors that help solve some of the related problems.

- **PWD lack of “certain” personal qualities**, which, however, are not specified:

“In this organization, when hiring an employee, not only his or her professional capacity but also personal qualities are taken into consideration, since those are regarded by the organization as a value.”

Employer “G”

It is hard to imagine that the vague and controversial requirement of “personal qualities” would not open the door to arbitrariness. In fact, this barrier can be seen as being not so much in the subjective domain as in the grey area bordering on discrimination.

At the same time interviewed employers, albeit very few, mentioned factors that can be construed as manifestations of discrimination on the grounds of disability. Those include stereotypes:

“Employers do not believe that PWD can handle their job well. This [stereotype] exists in our society.”

Employer “G”

and preference of non-disabled people:

“It is no secret that employers give preference to healthy people.”

Employer “I”

It should also be borne in mind that personal experience, which gives the first-hand knowledge, colors the individual perceptions and influence their future hiring decisions and preferences. Therefore, the interviewed employers were also asked to name the problems that employers usually encounter in case of PWD employees. The answers testify that most of them have little to no experience in employing PWD and that even when they do, they did not give much thought to it probably because (to name but a few possible reasons) there were not many PWD employees or disability was not too severe to cause problems or problems were dealt with a lower level of management, etc. In fact, most of the responses are based on speculation rather than on hard facts and relevant experience.

Three employers gave no definitive answer. **Three** other employers believe there are no difficulties whatsoever. It is noteworthy, however, that they are not absolutely certain, as they chose to preface their answers with the word “seem.” The typical common answer in this case was: “It seems to me that there are no difficulties.” One of them even went so far as to say that, on the contrary, there are benefits for employers who have PWD employees, especially since PWD transportation and related problems are not the employer’s concern.

The problems encountered by employers depend on type and severity of disability. In any case, as one employer put it:

“Working with them [PWD] is difficult because they have health problems, so adjustments have to be made in terms of shorter work hours, easier work, etc.”

Employer “E”

In case PWD have psychological complexes and/or lack effective interaction skills, they may be a problem for a team work, thus requiring additional efforts and special arrangements.

Accommodation also includes adaptation of the work place, which can also be a problem, even though there is some government support.

The interviews with employers identified a number of barriers to PWD employment. Even though their responses should be dealt with some reservations because in some cases they are based more on hearsay and speculation rather than on firsthand experience, their attitudes and perceptions are important. The findings can be used in the formulation of

policies aimed to remove those barriers, including those barriers that persist in people's minds in the form of stereotypes, prejudice and misinformation.

EC REPRESENTATIVES' VIEW

Representatives from Employment Centers were asked to identify barriers to PWD employment in private, public and NGO sectors.

Not surprisingly, most barriers, in their view, are in private sector.

The first and foremost barrier is **employers' mentality**. Employers, it would seem, are not eager to hire PWD because they tend to hold on to stereotypes that PWD are problematic employees and that they cannot demand much from PWD. Another aspect of this perception is what might be called a "cost-effectiveness factor." In other words, employers see PWD as a liability, not an asset. As EC representative put it:

"The employer pays wages and employment of non-disabled people yields a bigger return."

EC representative in region "B"

"The main reason is non-disabled people's greater ability to work and higher effectiveness."

EC representative in region "D"

- No less exacting is an **excessive qualifications requirement**. In the words of an EC representative:

"It is very difficult for PWD to get a job in the private sector because these days employers set stringent requirements for specialists."

EC representative in region "E"

This is indeed a serious problem, which reflects an existing tendency on the labor market. On the one hand, employers tend to impose rigorous standards of performance for and have at time unrealistically high expectations of specialists. On the other hand, they rely heavily on educational credentials. PWD clearly stand at a disadvantage. Given an excessive supply on the labor market, employers tend to disregard or pass over PWD.

- The situation is further aggravated by **employers' monopoly on decision-making**.

"In the private sector it is [the employer's monopoly] on decision-making. He is the owner. In any case, employers do not want PWD as employees."

EC representative in region "C"

Therefore, everything is predicated on employer's good will or lack thereof. As one EC representative put it,

“The problem of the private sector is that no one can influence it unless there is good will.”

EC representative in region “F”

- While the next barrier was mentioned primarily in the context of the private sector, it was deemed to apply across the board. It might be called **“natural” constraints**, i.e. a lack of relevant knowledge and skills or a type of disability, which is an impediment to work in a given sphere. Whereas the above-mentioned barriers could be “blamed” on employers, this one is seen as “objective.” For instance, people with mobility or physical disability can hardly be expected to be able to work in construction. An EC representative mentions the service sector:

“... Most vacancies are in the service sector, where employers need non-disabled people more.”

EC representative in region “D”

This barrier was most often cited in connection with the public sector. EC representative did not fail to stress time and again that “vacancies in the public sector are filled on a competitive basis as per the *Law on Civil Service*. The law states that disability may not be regarded as an obstacle to any position in the civil service.” Therefore, they argue, nothing other than knowledge and personal abilities stands in the PWD way to a position in the civil service:

“If the PWD has sufficient mental abilities, if he or she knows relevant laws and is recognized a winner in the contest, it is natural that he or she should be hired.”

EC representative in region “E”

- Even though the public sector is hailed as the most favorable one for PWD, there are several caveats. To begin with, vacancies in the civil service are not filled through Employment Centers. PWD are left at their own devices, **with no assistance, advice and encouragement**. Many of them do not know the exact procedure and requirements. Secondly, while in theory PWD are more protected in the public sector, **there are no absolute guarantees against arbitrariness**. As one EC representative put it,

“Nevertheless, the cases, when decision is made by one person, cannot be ruled out.”

EC representative in region “D”

- Finally, a personal **passive stand** and a **psychological makeup** of the PWD also may constitute a barrier. Some PWD are incapable (or think that they are incapable) of closeness to other people, they feel uncomfortable interacting with others. Thus, even when there are vacancies (especially in the NGO sector), they would prefer to work at or from home or not work at all. Passive stance is a problem, too. In the words of an EC representative:

“In general, looking for a job is a full-time occupation. If a person wants to find a job, he or she has to proceed according to a carefully designed plan. Our people, however, think that they should just sit at home, while the EC or another agency will offer them a job. If the person does not take the initiative, it may well be the case that no one will ever call him or her.”

EC representative in region “D”

* * *

It is noteworthy that interviewed EC representatives in most instances outlined possible solutions. As a way to overcome PWD passive stance, they cited an initiative taken by an EC in Gyumri, which set up a special Work Club and training groups. The PWD who visit the Work Club are the first to enroll in training and they are more likely to be proactive and take an initiative in a job search.

As regards employers’ mentality, they believe it is important to highlight the positive approach of those employers *“who claim they have that it does not make any difference for them [whether it is PWD or non-disabled people] so far as PWD meet their requirements in terms of professional skills”* (EC representative in region “D”).

In any case, “the issue of privileges and incentives” was a recurrent theme in EC recommendations. It can be inferred from their words that it all boils down to material and financial incentives for employers. Thus, focus should be on expanding the existing state programs to support PWD employment and on introducing tax breaks and exemptions for employers:

“The compensation program is very useful. It helps negotiate with employers and get PWD jobs”

EC representative in region “D”

“The government should make a decision to provide incentives to employers in case PWD constitute a certain percentage of their workforce.”

EC representative in region “B”

As they learned experientially, it is easier to deal with big companies (e.g. *VivaCell* or *Orange*) because small businesses are less interested in hiring PWD. Thus, making more efforts trying to engage big companies is seen as, at least, a partial solution to a PWD employment problem.

It should be noted, however, that pointing at charity as a big companies’ sole motive for hiring PWD (“If a [big] company has already gained a firm foothold and has a heavy demand in workforce, it becomes possible to get a job for a PWD there because the employer already has profit and can engage in charity”), their good intentions notwithstanding, some EC representatives themselves **perpetuate** the stereotype that PWD cannot be productive workers and that hiring them can be done merely as charity at the cost to one’s profit and other business interests and thus **send** a wrong message to employers, PWD and public at large.

Based on the interviews with EC representatives it can be concluded that while government entities can and should help PWD to *acquire knowledge* and *special skills* to become more competitive on the labor market as well as to enhance their self-confidence so as to apply for jobs in the private sector and in the civil service, NGOs can be instrumental in helping PWD develop and hone communication, interaction and conflict management skills as well as the ability to build rapport and engage in teamwork.

It is quite unexpected that none of the interviewed EC representatives raised an issue of an **affirmative action** in the public sector. They contend that by and large PWD get fair treatment on the basis of equality. However, formal equality is not enough. It is a well-known fact that equal application of the same norms and rules to unequal groups more often than not leads to unequal results. Furthermore, as experts and practitioners emphasize, equal treatment in the context of the existing inequality tends to deepen inequality. It is advisable therefore to consider the use of **temporary special measures** as a compensatory and equalizing mechanism.

Gender aspects in hiring

PWD VIEWS

Numerous studies the world over demonstrate that women, especially women with disabilities, are usually subjected to multiple discrimination. So, it was important to probe all three groups of respondents on the issue of gender-based discrimination in hiring, which is closely related to the previous question.

When asked whether women or men with disabilities are turned down for a job more often, 12 out of 50 surveyed PWD said they do not know, while 22 contended that gender plays no role. The proportion of female and male respondents who think so is virtually the same. Thus, the respondents who bracket off gender of the hiring equation constitute the largest group, even though being a plurality and not the majority.

Only 16 respondents believe that there is gender-based discrimination in hiring, with 8 of them pointing at women and the other 8 – at men with disabilities as victims of discrimination. It is noteworthy that each sex believes that they are more discriminated against than the other.

In the subset of landmine victims, the denial of the gender-based discrimination in turning down a PWD applying for a job is even more marked, with 6 out of 10 sharing that view and only 2 saying that there is gender-based discrimination (a female respondent noted that women are turned down more often, while a male respondent held the opposite view).

EMPLOYER'S VIEWS

Most employers concur in stressing the absence of gender-based differences in the impact of barriers to PWD employment. They say that they do not think that gender matters in this case or, as one employer put it:

“A [gender] difference is neither felt nor practiced...”

Employer “H”

When there is a difference, it is, in their view, accounted for by a specific nature of jobs (e.g. men are given preference when jobs require strenuous labor, while women are preferred when jobs entail fine work, handiwork, etc.). It was noted, however, by one employer that public perceptions play a significant role:

“Of course, in our society gender divisions are drawn very strictly.”

Employer “D”

In other words, the “specific nature” is underlain by public perceptions of what constitutes “feminine” or “masculine” occupations.

Only one employer said that preference is clearly given to men because men perform better. In his view:

“Not on every job a woman can work on a par with a man, even if the latter is PWD. ... [Employers] would sooner hire a man.”

Employer “B”

Thus, overall, employers believe that in hiring decisions the balance is not tipped in favor of one or the other sex and that a differential approach is rare and justified by the nature of work and other legitimate considerations.

EC REPRESENTATIVES’ VIEWS

Employment Center representatives deny even more forcefully than employers any differences in the impact that barriers to PWD employment can have on women and men. The common line was “I do not think that gender plays any role”, or as one EC representative put it:

“... Gender is not a factor.”

EC representative in region “B”

A probable explanation may be that disability is such a powerful factor affecting employers’ hiring decisions that gender simply pales by comparison.

On the other hand, the sex-disaggregated data on job placement from the Employment Centers covered by the study indicate that within the 12 months preceding the survey they secured employment to roughly the same number of women (44) and men (38). This pattern from the total sample holds true also for individual regions.

Thus, it is clear that EC representatives do not see any differential impact of those barriers on women and men. Does it mean that this differential impact is non-existent and women

and men are affected by the barriers to their employment to an equal extent? Hardly. Numerous studies and even the official statistics have demonstrated considerable gender inequality (i.e. a differential impact of various factors on women and men) on the labor market and in the employment sphere in Armenia.

It is highly unlikely that the situation with this particularly vulnerable group should be different. It may well be the case that given the *prevalence of a stereotypical division* of most occupations into “male” or “female” ones and, hence, *corresponding expectations* on all sides of the employment equation as well as the *traditionally ascribed* limited and inferior social roles for PWD, the interviewed EC representatives take some things for granted and do not see the impact as differential.

PWD Employment Needs

The barriers to PWD employment are so formidable that PWD cannot be merely left to their own devices as they obviously need serious assistance. None of the 9 currently unemployed PWD in the sample who applied for a position in various companies and institutions was hired, even though the applicants did not aim high. They sought the following positions: guard in a bank or a production company, low-level positions in mobile operator, electric power supply or construction companies, in a Ministry, a cleaning lady position in a school, etc. 3 of them were told that there were no vacancies at the time, which may or may not be the case. 6 PWD were definitely discriminated against.

- They fell victim to **prejudice and stereotyping**. The most prevalent forms of discrimination in this case were ageism and ableism:

“My application was not considered because of my age.”

57-year-old male respondent from Artashat

“In construction companies they did not believe that I can work and would reject me at once.”

37-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

“Companies “cannot” find jobs for people with disability.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

- Another factor is **education**, i.e. companies may demand higher qualification from a prospective employee than actually required by the job in question. Absence of a college degree was given by a mobile operator company as a reason for not hiring a PWD, even though he applied for a low-level position.

Confronted with real or perceived discrimination and prejudice, many PWD get disillusioned and frustrated and stop looking for jobs, as indicated in earlier sections.

While employment centers and agencies can be and at times are helpful, their assistance is very limited because of the scope of their powers, current economic climate, a situation on the labor market, prevalent ideas and stereotypes held by employers and public at large, etc.

According to the survey data, within the 12 months prior to the study, 4 employment centers in the country's regions and 2 in Yerevan had succeeded in getting jobs for 82 PWD, while they have 570 registered PWD. The number of job placements is very modest at best given the fact that many more PWD are not registered with employment centers.

The broad area of PWD employment needs was addressed in the study through the following specific issues:

1. The support of key entities
2. State programs facilitating PWD employment
3. Cooperation between employers and State Employment Service Agency
4. Vocational Education for PWD
5. Job retention by PWD.

I. The Support Role of Key Entities

In any case, other governmental and non-governmental entities and actors can have a bigger role in removing barriers to PWD employment. It is important to get the major stakeholders' perspectives and ideas on that matter. For the purpose of this study the following actors and entities were identified as potentially capable of playing a more significant and effective role in supporting and promoting PWD employment:

- (i) the RoA National Assembly,
- (ii) public administration and local self-government bodies,
- (iii) governmental and non-governmental entities (SMEA, medical and rehabilitation centers, special and inclusive educational institutions, media, churches, etc.),
- (iv) local and international foundations, and
- (v) local and international NGOs (including NGOs dealing with PWD issues). Within the framework of the study, all three groups of respondents (PWD, EC representatives and employers) were asked to share their views on how these entities can contribute to minimization of the above-mentioned obstacles to PWD employment.

They were also given an option to add other entities and specify their roles (VI).

The PWD response rate to these questions was quite impressive: about 70% of the PWD respondents expressed their opinions about what entities I and II can do to remove barriers to PWD employment and about 50% about entities III, IV and V.

It is noteworthy that the majority of the respondents who had nothing to say regarding the questions were in the age group of over 50. The typical responses of both male and female PWD were as follows:

“For me it is difficult to answer these questions; I am not a specialist in this sphere. I think it would be better to gather specialists dealing with PWD problems so that they suggest recommendations as to how improve our lives.”

62-year-old female respondent from Artashat

“I am not competent at these issues.”

51-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

The lack of knowledge on how the above-mentioned entities could contribute to the solution of the PWD employment problem did not, however, deter the respondents from pointing out that those entities can help them in other ways. Financial support figured prominently as the preferred type of assistance for both women and men:

“It is difficult to say something regarding these questions. I do not know what to say, I would only like to ask financial support.”

60-year-old female respondent from Artashat

“I do not know what to say regarding these questions. I was working for 30 years as a driver and it is not my job to make advices; but I will appreciate any financial support.”

62-year-old male respondent from Artashat

When not sure, the respondents sometimes still said:

“let them [the entities] do something good for PWD”

58-year-old female respondent from Gyumri.

Some respondents were critical of one or more entities in question. Their views will be presented in respective sub-sections.

(i) NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

PWD VIEWS

As mentioned earlier, some respondents were quite critical of the parliament. Lack of trust was a recurrent issue. Thus, as respondents put it:

“I do not trust the National Assembly. ... Members of Parliament do not do anything for the people.”

57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

“Should Members of Parliament wish to do so, they can do something for PWD. ...However, they do not do anything because that is not what is important for them; they think about other things.”

59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

Therefore:

“First of all the parliament should think about PWD. PWD are the same citizens as others.”

62-year-old female respondent from Gavar

“MPs should think at least a bit about people whose only source of income is their pension or poverty allowance.”

43-year-old female respondent from Yerevan

This pessimism or lack of trust notwithstanding, most PWD had expectations and made positive comments regarding the role of the National Assembly in removing the barriers to PWD employment. Thus, the respondents believe that it should first and foremost **pass laws** or **include provisions** in the laws that it adopts which would create jobs for PWD or their family members:

“The National Assembly can create jobs.”

36-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor; 57-year-old female respondent from Gyumri;

58-year-old female respondent from Gavar and

59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

“... PWD's families' members should have employment so that our families can live adequately.”

59-year-old female respondent from Artashat

This is definitely a priority role for the parliament, as seen by the equal number of female and male respondents. It is such an important role that sometimes it is seen as the only one:

“The parliament should create jobs, nothing else, just jobs.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gavar

Another respondent from Gavar put it in a slightly different way:

“MPs should start thinking about PWD and give them a chance to work and create jobs for them.”

62-year-old female respondent from Gavar

In some respondents' view, the parliament can **put pressure on employers** to hire PWD:

"MPs should make a decision that each employer must hire a PWD."

37-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

"By creating jobs MPs can force employers to hire PWD."

62- year-old female respondent from Gyumri

It does not, however, necessarily mean only *coercion* through sanctions. A primary focus may well be on *economic incentives*. In the words of one respondent:

"Employers would ... benefit, if they were completely exempt from tax or at least given a tax break, when employing PWD."

37-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

Another respondent focused on *loans*. In her view,

"the State should thus support individual entrepreneurs in the creation of jobs for PWD"

52- year-old female respondent from Vanadzor.

Since the respondents regard the National Assembly as a body that can adopt legislation to improve their socioeconomic situation and to provide better social protection, it is not surprising that the proposed measures to that end encompass not only benefits but also various **privileges**, including "those related to employment" (38-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor).

It is noteworthy that older PWD would like the parliament to **remove age limitations** on PWD employment:

"MPs can pass laws that will eliminate age limitations in employment, particularly for PWD."

57-year-old female respondent from Gyumri and 58-year-old female respondent from Gyumri

In some respondents' estimation, the parliament could take a more proactive stance and **establish new enterprises and industries** to provide more jobs to PWD:

"The Parliament should create new industries so that PWD would work there."

61-year-old female respondent from Gavar

"MPs should establish enterprises so that PWD could get employment."

18-year-old male respondent from Gavar

While the respondents do not specify how that could be done, it is clear that the proposed line of action concerns State-run enterprises, companies and other ventures.

Another role that the respondents see as potentially effective for the National Assembly is to **provide economic incentives** to and **expand economic opportunities** for PWD in terms of both self-employment and entrepreneurship:

“The National Assembly could give tax breaks to PWD associations (such as the Association of Blind People) or exempt them from taxes so that they could operate.”

54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

“MPs can pass a law that would enable PWD to engage in entrepreneurial activities on preferential terms.” (E.g. PWD can be provided with a kiosk so as to work as a craftsman or artisan).

47-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

“The parliament should give loans to PWD to start a business” (e.g. to start a farm).

43 year-old male respondent from Gavar

The parliament can also be helpful through funding and encouraging **educational** and **training programs** for PWD:

“The parliament should provide funding and offer educational programs so that PWD could obtain a second or third specialization, improve their knowledge and skills and would be able to obtain gainful employment due to it.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

This option, however, was the least popular with the respondents.

Landmine victims

On the whole, the opinions of the subset of landmine victims did not differ from those in the entire sample. For them, too, the priority role for the parliament was creation of jobs:

“MPs should amend legislation to create jobs for PWD.”

53-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

They also emphasized parliamentary measures that would:

- improve socioeconomic situation of PWD,
- address the PWD-related sections of laws that are quite flawed, and
- encourage or force employers to hire PWD.

It is noteworthy that only landmine victims raised the issues of *workplace accommodation* and *effective protection* of PWD labor rights:

“Amendments should be made [by MPs] so that PWD would not have to work long hours” (e.g. 12 instead of legally mandated 8). “Work places should be accommodated for PWD. At present such workplaces are few or non-existent.”

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

One landmine victim went so far as to suggest that geopolitical issues (independence from Russian Federation, lifting of Turkey’s blockade and integration into international entities) have to be resolved as a precondition for the solution of “unemployment as a global problem.” It should be solved first of all for non-disabled people, who will pay taxes and thus support PWD.” (43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan).

EMPLOYERS’ VIEWS

The surveyed employers regarded the following 3 main lines of the legislative action as the most effective for the solution of the problem of barriers to PWD employment: (a) better job security and more privileges for PWD, including quotas, jobs creation and support to PWD entrepreneurship (b) financial incentives for employers and (c) better laws and better enforcement of laws.

Some employers believe that at present PWD are not adequately protected in this country and that, besides, they are very isolated from the rest of the society not only because they cannot find employment but also because of mobility impairment (which is aggravated by the absence of ramps in many places, by problems with transportation, etc.). Thus, “the National Assembly can improve laws to make sure PWD are better protected” (Employer “G”).

The issue is sometimes regarded within a broader context of PWD rights in general. To begin with, the National Assembly can help with regard to PWD rights. The laws should clearly state what rights PWD have in this society and who must defend those rights. As regards employment, quotas can be set and “a decision can be made that jobs should be created especially for PWD ... Jobs for PWD can be assigned in companies...” (Employer “C”).

While considering creation of jobs for PWD, MPs could draw on the past experience. In the words of one employer: “In the past there were special enterprises for the blind and for the hearing impaired.” At the same time, the employer stresses that “it should not necessarily be a separate enterprise.” It can be a separate unit or shop in an enterprise. (Employer “H”).

An important step in the right direction, in another employer’s estimation, would be for the National Assembly “to decrease taxes for working PWD.” (Employer “A”).

The last but not the least measure is support to PWD entrepreneurship. It is noteworthy that even though privileges and tax breaks granted to PWD entrepreneurs would arguably put other business people at a competitive disadvantage (at least hypothetically), still that support was advocated. In the words of one employer:

“The National Assembly should exempt PWD entrepreneurs from taxes and grant privileges to them.”

Employer “E”

While creation of jobs is an important undertaking, it is limited in scope, especially in a market economy. Quotas, too, can help but only to a certain extent.

In any case, coercion is not the best policy. As one employer put it:

“The NA cannot tell me as an employer to hire this or that person. That would be wrong. No law would help.”

Employer “B”

This and a number of other surveyed employers see financial incentives as a much better and effective measure. In the words of another employer:

“Incentives should be given to employers who have PWD employees.”

Employer “D”

In the respondents’ view, those incentives should make employers interested to employ PWD. More specifically, as one employer put it:

“The National Assembly should legislate provision of subsidies to employers who employ PWD and grant tax breaks, when PWD constitute a certain percentage of the workforce.”

Employer “I”

Overall, relevant legislation has to be considerably improved. The best way to do that would be

“to adopt international laws and norms regarding this sphere. There should be a law regarding PWD employment, which would address recruitment process, workplace adaptation, salaries and other issues that PWD may encounter during their careers.”

Employer “F”

No less important feature is supervision over the enforcement of laws. Control was seen by one employer as “the most important thing.” (Employer “C”).

EC REPRESENTATIVES’ VIEWS

Employment Center representatives highlighted two priority measures: better **job security** (primarily through **quotas**) and **incentives**:

“The National Assembly should provide more favorable and privileged conditions and additional guarantees for PWD employees through legislation.”

EC representative in region “D”

“The National Assembly can come up with legislative initiatives which will provide more opportunities and guarantees for PWD job placement.”

EC representative in region “B”

Quotas are seen as one of the most effective measures to that end:

“In the past we had work place quotas for PWD. I do not remember which percent it was, but employer had an obligation to hire PWD according to the governmental program. Thus, if we can pass a similar law regarding quotas for PWD, it will make the process of getting a job for PWD easier.”

EC representative in region “A”

According to a representative of another Employment Center, the Parliament should introduce a 5% PWD quota, which will apply when employer has at least 50-100 employees.

This measure should be reflected in the law on entrepreneurship, with a separate article focusing on work places for PWD.

EC representative in region “E”

Yet another EC representative believes that a mandatory PWD quota should be higher (at least 10% for businesses and companies with 20 and more employees. In that case, the EC representative argues, PWD will feel protected and will be aware that they have a real chance to compete for the vacancy because only PWD will compete for it. (EC representative in region “F”).

It is noteworthy that even in the case when the past experience with quotas was not particularly positive the EC representative still recommended them. In that representative’s view, quotas did not prove effective probably because they had not been designed properly. (EC representative in region “B”).

Financial incentives are seen as another effective measure that will promote PWD employment. While in some cases recommendations focused on the expansion of the existing “State employment programs, which provide financial incentives to employers to hire PWD by providing 50% of the wages paid to a PWD employee” (EC representative in region “C”), in some other cases the emphasis was placed on “tax breaks and exemptions” (EC representative in region “B”).

An interesting idea regarding PWD wages was put forth. In case of mobility impairment, the employed PWD not infrequently have “to give a portion of their wages to a companion who accompanies them and helps to move around.” That should be taken into consideration by MPs while amending the law that sets wages for PWD (EC representative in region “F”).

(ii) PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL-SELF GOVERNMENT BODIES

PWD VIEWS

As in case of the National assembly, some respondents were critical of the public administration and/or local self-government bodies.

To begin with, while it is the responsibility of the government to do away with or at least minimize corruption, some respondents (in particular, the 54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor and the 59-year-old female respondent from Artashat) noted that it was still not a rare occurrence, especially in SMEAs, as many PWD routinely encounter it. The respondents felt that the government could definitely do much more.

A landmine victim from Yerevan is even more critical of the government and its officials:

“People, who are cleverer and more competent at these issues than me, consult and give advice to our government, but nothing changes. I do not expect anything from our officials as they are corrupt and think only about their personal interests. I think that our government should be more attentive towards its people, in particular PWD. We should feel protected and worthy in our society. But no one thinks about PWD in our country, and buildings are not adapted for PWD wheelchairs.”

51-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

If not critical, some other respondents were skeptical, at times highly skeptical, of those bodies’ ability to improve the PWD employment situation:

“It is unlikely that the Regional Governor’s Office and the City Hall could do anything [in that respect].” 57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

“Bodies of local self-government can do absolutely nothing in this respect [i.e. to remove obstacles to PWD employment]. Initiatives should be taken at the top so that local self-government bodies could do something at a local level.”

62-year-old female respondent from Gyumri

“I do not think that LGs seriously address PWD issues (whether transportation or other issues) in their localities.”

33-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

Nevertheless, it does not come as a surprise that most of the interviewed PWD should have expectations of the public administration bodies (i.e. the central government and marz/regional government) and of local self-government bodies similar to those of the National Assembly both in terms of substance and methods of their intervention. It is not that the respondents are unaware of the *separation of powers* or of a *difference in functions, competences and jurisdiction* of the above-mentioned bodies in general and in regard to PWD employment-related issues in particular. The fact of the matter is that getting and maintaining a job constitutes an acute and daunting problem for most PWD, hence they would not miss any chance, however slim, that presents itself to draw the attention of the said bodies to a whole host of employment-related and socioeconomic problems that PWD

are confronted with on a regular basis. Therefore, while speaking about their vision of how those bodies could use their powers and capacity to expand employment opportunities for PWD, the respondents at the same time raised other issues as well. *Financial assistance, better and more affordable medical services, higher pensions, benefits and allowances, less bureaucracy and corruption, tuition fee waivers for children of PWD, lower rates for income and real property taxes and for utilities and preferential treatment in getting housing* figured prominently in this segment of interviews.

First of all, PWD (both women and men) expect **creation of jobs for PWD**:

“Jobs should be created for PWD.”

59-year-old and 58-year-old female respondents from Gyumri

Employment is such a top priority for PWD that other factors are definitely overshadowed by it. As some respondents put it:

“Jobs should be created, nothing else.”

43-year-old male respondent from Gavar

“Jobs should be created, only jobs.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gavar

As one respondent indicates, by creating jobs for PWD the public administration and local self-government bodies not only will improve material situation of PWD but will thereby also stem immigration. (59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri).

It is noteworthy that in the respondents’ view, not only the central government but also the Regional Governor’s Office and local self-government bodies can be instrumental in creating jobs or in supporting the creation of jobs. This is emphasized particularly by respondents from Vanadzor:

“The Regional Governor’s Office and the City Hall can help in the solution of the employment problem ...”

38-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

“The Regional Governor’s Office and the City Hall can support job creation.”

36-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

“Local governments can create jobs for PWD.”

31-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

While these respondents were vague about concrete steps that those bodies could take to secure jobs for PWD, some other respondents were more specific and outlined several options. One proposed line of action was revitalizing the enterprises and association that

provided jobs to persons with a certain type of disability. One respondent mentioned an association for blind people that existed in the city. She also recollected another enterprise, which was for the mute, and concluded that

“it would be good if there was something also for people with other types of disability.”

52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor.

Another respondent from Vanadzor points out the fact that Regional Governor’s office and local governments have quite a few institutions under their authority (such as general education schools, kindergartens, arts and sports schools, condominiums, etc.). In his view, there are quite a few jobs in all those institutions that can be done by PWD. So, he makes a good point:

“If each institution hires at least one PWD, 50-60 PWD will get employment in the city [Vanadzor].”

51-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

The same function of creating jobs for PWD by opening enterprises is also assigned to the central government. Thus, two male PWD respondents from Artashat recall that in Soviet times there was a factory for PWD in their town and maintain that

“it would be very useful if our government could now open a factory for PWD and provide people like me with a job.”

58- and 57-year-old male respondents from Artashat.

While it is important that the government restart and take care of the operation of enterprises for PWD, there should be a consistent policy to make sure that those enterprises are viable and self-sustainable. A female respondent from Gavar noted that the government:

“should provide enterprises with projects as an assistance.”

58-year-old female respondent from Gavar.

The government could provide *tax exemptions* or *breaks* to such enterprises or at least *level a playing field*. As a female respondent from Vanadzor pointed out, the government-run enterprise where she had worked stopped production because of *unscrupulous competition* by private entrepreneurs. (54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor).

Some categories of PWD (first of all people with visual impairment) have difficulty in moving along and crossing the streets. Besides, transportation costs can be a problem. Those two factors can have an adverse impact on PWD opportunities to get and maintain a job. Therefore, some PWD expect that those issues will be addressed. In framing those issues a female respondent from Vanadzor assigns a central role to the Regional Governor’s Office and the City Hall. In her view, those entities “could help visually impaired persons by installing exterior handrails and audible signaling devices at pedestrian crosswalks” and “the

City Hall can issue for free an Access Travel Pass to a PWD and a Companion Card to a PWD companion.” (54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor)²¹.

Another measure that can be taken by public administration and local self-government bodies concerns an *age cap*. In the words of one respondent, they “*can help by eliminating an age limit in employment.*” (57-year-old female respondent from Gyumri).

An idea of founding *State-owned farms* was also put forward. In a respondent’s view, the government should take land plots from people, consolidate them and get them cultivated, thereby creating jobs, including jobs for PWD (61-year-old female respondent from Gavar).

Secondly, a number of ideas were proposed concerning **support to self-employment and/or entrepreneurship**.

This support is expected from any public administration and local self-government body (although mostly from local authorities) and may take various forms, including loans, tax breaks and financial and/or logistical assistance, permits, etc. In the words of one respondent:

“*The authorities should decrease taxes so that PWD entrepreneurs could do business.*”

18-year-old male respondent from Gavar

Another respondent wants a loan to start up a business:

“*I would only like to request a loan for opening some business...*”

52-year-old female respondent from Artashat

A 58-year-old male respondent from Artashat would request unspecified support from local officials to open a mini convenience store in his apartment.

Local authorities can help in other ways too. As one respondent put it:

“*Local self-government bodies can provide a meeting space for PWD so as to take their opinions into consideration. PWD could get together there and hold discussions to generate ideas.*”

33-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

In her view, local authorities can get a feedback from PWD concerning their efforts, initiatives and plans for employment opportunities for PWD and can help PWD get together to discuss possible cooperation or other ways to start up small businesses or undertake other projects or to explore opportunities for self-employment.

Thirdly, the government could help through initiatives in education sector:

²¹ According to the respondent, PWD requested the City Hall in Vanadzor to issue them such cards. However, the City Hall denied the request on the grounds that transportation is provided by private companies and the City Hall cannot interfere. It should be noted that there are at least 120 visually impaired persons in the city and many more people with other types of disability.

“It would be good if technical and vocational schools were established to train specialists that are needed. Priority in enrolment should be given to PWD ... In that case PWD will easily find a job.”

52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

While, probably, it is a somewhat over-optimistic view, nevertheless, good education is indeed a key to employment, especially in case of technical and vocational education that is geared to local labor market needs.

Landmine victims

As other PWD, landmine victims, too, emphasized **creation of jobs** as a priority. As a female respondent put it:

“So what that we are PWD? We can work.”

43-year-old female respondent from Yerevan

She adds then that the government can offer an easier job to people with severe disability.

Emphasizing the fact that PWD are very poor because they are for the most part unemployed and the disability allowance is less than adequate, a male respondent believes that the government has to make a choice between the following two alternatives:

“The government should either increase the allowances for us to be able to keep ourselves and our families ... or should provide jobs to us.”

53-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

As the respondents in this subset of PWD have at least a physical impairment, it is not surprising that they see a mobility issue as particularly important:

“local governments can build ramps in the buildings, install elevators, etc.”

33-year-old male respondent from Yerevan,

while another respondent points also at a transportation issue:

“The public administration and local self-government bodies should think what they must do to make sure PWD do not have a mobility problem in buildings and in public transportation.”

43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

Their focus on the mobility problem can be accounted for by the fact that a PWD employment opportunity is in most cases predicated on the solution of that problem. Availability of adequate transportation and physical accessibility of buildings (both outside and inside) are a *de facto* precondition for employment of people with mobility impairment.

It is noteworthy that landmine victims were the only respondents in the sample who would request the authorities' assistance with getting employment for their family members. One respondent spoke about his son, while the other, about his wife:

"My son is 30 years old and till now he cannot find a job."

54-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

"The main breadwinner in my family is my wife. She lost her job recently and now is actively looking for a new opportunity."

40-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

EMPLOYERS' VIEWS

The surveyed employers did not have many ideas. 2 of them did not venture any opinion at all. One employer took a skeptical view:

"The public administration and local self-government bodies can hardly do something because steps are taken by entrepreneurs. Who can force the owner to start a business where PWD will work?"

Employer "C"

That view was seconded by another employer who pointed out that the government should follow through its own decrees dealing with PWD employment issues:

"There are so many decrees... excellent decrees but which one of those is implemented?"

Employer "H"

Others believed that those bodies could do something on their own or in cooperation with businesses. Thus, one employer thought that they can "create more jobs for PWD" (Employer "D"), while another believed that local self-government bodies can (and actually must) help PWD by supporting their business initiatives:

"They can provide production space for free in case a PWD has a project but does not have resources."

Employer "E"

It was also suggested that the public administration and local self-government bodies can initiate or support measures aimed to improve accessibility of enterprises, offices and other businesses and facilities where PWD can be employed. That support has yet to materialize in some localities. One employer complained of the City Hall that had not given their company a permit to make a new entrance to their building, which would be physically accessible to PWD (Employer "B"). It goes without saying that accessibility would make a positive impact on PWD employment prospects.

Cooperation is seen as a key to successful solution of a number of PWD employment-related problems. One respondent pointed out that those bodies cannot demand that

employers undertake *PWD employment programs* because few of them have sufficient resources, especially in case of small and medium businesses (Employer “G”). In other words, the above-mentioned bodies should take a proactive stance and actively seek collaboration with employers thereby pooling not only financial but also administrative, logistical and intellectual resources.

Finally, in employers’ view, these bodies can effectively contribute to the solution of the PWD employment problem by solving transportation problems. Indeed, as international and domestic practices demonstration, the solution of transportation problems for PWD can significantly expand their employment opportunities. One of the interviewed employers made the following suggestion:

“The City Hall can import 1 or 2 special buses for PWD or get usual buses adapted to PWD needs. Those bus rides should be free. The bus lines should be in certain parts of the city.”

Employer “I”

The employer then goes on to say that when PWD do not have an opportunity to move around, they have to stay at home, where they can perform only a very limited range of jobs. In other words, their occupational choices are very limited in that case. The solution of the PWD transportation problem will not simply improve their employment chances but will make it possible for them to work side by side with others, including non-disabled people. There are solid grounds to contend, as does the employer in question, that in the working environment PWD will feel themselves as full-fledged members of the team and of the society.

EC REPRESENTATIVES’ VIEWS

The EC representatives’ responses to this question demonstrate, first of all, that they regard the above-mentioned bodies as very important in terms of the solution of PWD employment problem and, secondly, that they have a number of quite original and interesting ideas.

To begin with, those bodies can in collaboration with ECs provide guidance and support to PWD at the local level, including implementation of targeted programs (EC representative in region “D”). One of the spin-offs of such activities will be better understanding of the issue against the background of a local context.

Similar to employers, EC representatives regard the solution of a number of problems as a precondition for an effective solution of the PWD employment problem. In other words, as one EC representative put it:

“Many problems have to be solved before job placement.”

EC representative in region “B”

First and foremost, a daunting problem of physical accessibility of public, residential and work places through ramps and elevators has to be solved. For example, if the PWD using a

wheelchair lives on the third floor, this representative says that it is “the end of story” under ordinary conditions:

“When you start thinking how he will get down and then get to his work place, you see that the issue is closed.”

EC representative in region “B”

Thus, two important conclusions can be drawn here:

- (a) *“Therefore, an individual, sensitive approach is required;”* and
- (b) *“If solved, [the accessibility problem] will pave the way for the solution of other important problems in terms of both moral and psychological perspectives and protection of PWD rights.”*

EC representative in region “B”

Another EC representative also supports targeted programs at a local level ensuring PWD employment or creating new jobs for them, for instance, through the establishment of so-called “special social enterprises” that would employ exclusively or primarily PWD (EC representative in region “E”). Such undertakings can be seen as a responsibility of local authorities to a vulnerable segment of their constituencies. Therefore, what matters most is not profit *per se*, which can be low, but socioeconomic and civic effect for PWD. That provides *raison d’être* for funding of such initiatives by bodies of local self-government.

An EC representative from another region sees the primary role of those bodies in targeted policy interventions and provision of funding, both of which are necessary to get PWD employed through job creation and promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship. This EC representative is quite adamant that the solution of the PWD employment “requires serious investments.” (EC representative in region “C”).

A quota issue was brought up here as well. One EC representative points out that:

“If introduced by law, the quotas should be implemented first of all in public administration bodies and other State entities, since they have more than 20 employees.”

EC representative in region “F”

The EC representative goes on to say that private employers ask why State bodies do not hire PWD. Of course, it is a legitimate question, which will pop up constantly once the quota has been introduced.

Another aspect of the same issue deals with the civil service. The same representative believes that “for PWD, a contest for civil service positions should be held separately.”

It is indeed a very interesting suggestion, which offers an opportunity of an equitable solution for the PWD employment problem both disability and/or gender perspectives.

(iii) GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES:

SOCIAL- MEDICAL EXPERTISE AGENCY, MEDICAL AND REHABILITATION CENTERS, SPECIAL AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, MASS MEDIA, THE CHURCH

PWD VIEWS

It is noteworthy that significantly fewer respondents addressed each of the above-mentioned entities in terms of what the latter could do. Thus, only 2 respondents spoke about SMEAs, and briefly at that. They are (a woman and a man) in the oldest age group. Only two respondents, both males, spoke about educational institutions. 6 (3 male and 3 female) respondents addressed the role of the church. An equal number of women and men (6 each) focused on medical institutions. Out of 10 respondents who discussed the role of media only 3 were women.

Other respondents either did not know or would take a skeptical or critical view of those entities with regard to their potential role in improving PWD employment chances.

Opinions concerning most entities did not differ on the basis of gender, with some men and women holding similar views, while some others expressing opinions that differ among the respondents of the same sex more than between the respondents of the different sexes.

Another notable conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis of the responses is that only in two instances the respondents spoke directly about the role of a given entity in promoting PWD employment. One was about information on vacancies. In the words of the respondent:

“State and non-State entities can help by informing PWD about vacancies.”

57-year-old female respondent from Gyumri

That statement, however, did not come without a caveat. The respondent expressed reservations concerning the dissemination of information on vacancies because of nepotism. In any case, their role, whether actual or potential, is clearly stated.

The second instance dealt with the role of educational institutions. According to the respondent, they surely can play a role helping PWD to get employment:

“If a PWD becomes a specialist, he or she will be able to find a job.”

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

It follows then that more and better education is an effective key to the solution of the PWD employment problem.

In all other cases the respondents, while they had a lot to say about one or another of those entities, what they actually said was only indirectly related to employment. In some cases the connection was implied or implicitly stated, in some others the respondents clearly

proceeded from the assumption that the connection was obvious in the particular context of the same question given with regard to the entities grouped in clusters I-VI.

Since SMEAs play a crucial role in PWD lives and especially in terms of their access to and opportunities for employment, it was only natural to expect that the respondents would focus on them. However, as mentioned earlier, that was not the case. Actually, only 2 respondents spoke at all about their role.

The first one would like them to be more PWD-friendly, or, as he put it:

“Social-Medical Expertise Centers should be more favorably-disposed toward PWD.”

57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

The second respondent would assign a positive function to SMEA. In her view,

“SMEA can make a referral to a physical therapy center for PWD to get treatment”.

62-year-old female respondent from Gavar

This statement ties in with the central topic of the discourse in this section, viz. quality health services. They are regarded by the plurality of the PWD respondents as the single most significant factor. The line of reasoning seems to be as follows: Effective health services help improve PWD health, including their ability to work, thereby expanding their employment opportunities.

It should be noted that for the respondents, health is not limited to physical health only but also includes mental and emotional health.

Older respondents would have healthcare services, including medical examination and medication provided to PWD for free:

“I would love to have really free health services.”

57-year-old male respondent from Artashat

“I would like medical examination to be provided for free and that this right would not be only on paper.”

57-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

“If we were provided with free medication, it would be great support to us.”

62-year-old female respondent from Artashat

Younger respondents do not so much expect free service as put more emphasis on their affordability for and accessibility to PWD (38-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor) and on more effective operation of healthcare institutions without long waiting lines (36-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor).

However, there is an across-the-board consensus as regards vouchers for sanatorium treatment. Younger and older, female and male respondents alike suggest that medical and rehabilitation centers should issue those to all categories of PWD for free (54-year-old female and 31- and 57-year-old male respondents from Vanadzor).

The issue of modernization of healthcare institutions was also raised:

“Medical and rehabilitation centers should make conscious efforts to get new equipment. They should modernize so as to be able to better help patients.”

52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

The church is seen as an institution that can make a contribution to emotional and mental health of PWD. It can thus “play a prominent role.” (51-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor). It also “can give peace of mind” (52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor). In the opinion of another female respondent from Vanadzor, by attending the church “PWD would also feel better and would take their disability easier” (54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor). But the church does not merely help PWD to come to terms with their situation. It gives faith and in the words of one respondent, it can help:

“to realize that life goes on and that life is not limited to the physical aspects and there are spiritual aspects as well, i.e. the church gives spiritual food to the PWD so that they would not give up on life... and would want to struggle and would understand that it is not the end yet.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

It can reasonably be concluded that by conveying this positive message to PWD the church helps boost their self-esteem and take a more active stance in life, including employment.

This role can on a larger scale be played no less efficiently by mass media. It can, in the respondents’ view, provide psychological support “the PWD will realize that human being is always a human being and that they should not underestimate themselves and should stop telling themselves that they are social cripples” - 33-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor) and raise their awareness about various developments and provide information about “PWD rights and duties, laws and other legal Acts so that PWD would be informed what is done for them” (33-year-old male respondent from Yerevan), about specific projects (52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor), including employment-related ones.

But it can do even more than that. Since it plays an important role in our life today, media can also raise awareness of the general public by providing coverage of PWD problems more often (62-year-old female respondent from Gavar). One respondent specifically emphasized this point because, as he put it:

“If media instills respect towards us, people, including those in the government, will not think little of us.”

37-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

This view is seconded by a respondent from Gyumri:

“Media should present PWD issues to high-ranking officials.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

The tipping point, however, has yet to be reached. In the words of another respondent:

“There has been good media coverage, especially within the past 2 years. But acts should follow words.”

54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

This is particularly important because much depends on decision- and policy-makers in terms of concrete measures and strategies and of changing the overall public mentality, including perceptions and stereotypes.

Due to media efforts, non-disabled people, including potential employers and coworkers, will feel more comfortable dealing and interacting with PWD.

Only two respondents (both males, landmine victims from Yerevan, in their 30s) stressed a positive role of educational institutions. One was mentioned earlier. The other focused on their role in social integration of PWD. In his view:

“Special and inclusive educational institutions should integrate PWD into society thus making them full members and liberating them from psychological and physical complexes.”

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

Interestingly enough, yet another respondent feels that a note of caution is in order here. According to him:

“Inclusive schools were introduced in a rush. There are unmanageable children who make an adverse impact on discipline and a psychological climate in the classroom. An expert examination has to be undertaken before introducing such initiatives. Humane approach should not lead to violation of other people’s rights.”

51-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

This is a point that should not be treated lightly but that needs to be addressed seriously by educationalists, psychologists and other professionals.

* * *

Even more so than in case of the questions regarding the National Assembly and public administration and local self-government bodies many respondents did not know what the governmental and non-governmental entities in question could do to promote PWD employment.

A typical answer in that case would be:

"I do not know what they [special educational institutions] can do."

57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

and

"I have no idea what the church can do."

38-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

As mentioned earlier, a number of the respondents were either skeptical or critical of those entities' role, or else they merely commented that those structures (such as SMEAs, healthcare institutions, etc.) do what they are supposed to do.

Speaking about all those entities, one respondent claimed that:

"In reality they do not do anything; they do the talk but they do not do the walk."

58-year-old female respondent from Gyumri

Two respondents spoke about SMEA in the context of corruption:

"I think our officials need to make efforts to minimize corruption in SMEAs. My daughter is also a PWD and we often apply to SMEA for different reasons but we always need to give a bribe to solve our problems."

60-year-old female respondent from Artashat

"I have a negative opinion of the SMEAs. First of all, I would like them to change their attitude to PWD: at present it is 'if you have money, you are talking; if you do not, off you go and fend for yourself'."

33-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

The third respondent, a landmine victim, criticized them for excessive red tape:

"Before getting a disability group for life, for 8 years I had to go to SMEA on an annual basis to undergo an expert evaluation. Those bureaucratic requirements, those goings from one doctor's room to another do not make sense. I do not have a leg; nothing will change. What's the use of going there every time? It seems like they tire out PWD for nothing."

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

Medical centers are criticized for corruption and neglect of vulnerable groups, including PWD. As one respondent put it:

"They turn PWD away saying that with their disability group they do not qualify for free services."

59-year-old female respondent from Gavar

According to another respondent:

“Corruption in healthcare facilities should be minimized so that everyone could make use of health services equally.”

54-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

The church is criticized for not taking interest and not being active in the PWD issues (59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri)

Educational institutions are seen as useless but the blame is placed on the State:

“What’s the point in taking PWD [to educational institutions] and giving them education, if they become unemployed anyway? The State does not accept us.”

33-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

Finally, media is criticized for lack of interest:

“Media is not interested in what problems, predicaments and obstacles ordinary people face. Media would not or cannot do anything.”

59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

or for deliberately misleading people, including PWD:

“Media announced several times vacancies in a chemical plant. I went there immediately only to find out that it was bluff. They deliberately broadcast that information because elections are upcoming and they want to show that there are vacancies.”

36-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

EMPLOYERS’ VIEWS

To begin with, it should be noted that 2 surveyed employers did not give an answer or make a comment to this question.

Another one was skeptical about a potential role of the entities in question. In his view, none of those can help because jobs are needed but they cannot create them (Employer “H”).

The top priority for the rest is healthcare services. 5 out of 6 employers mentioned them primarily or even exclusively. The main point that they make is that medical and rehabilitation centers should provide services and/or medication and other interventions for free.

One employer suggests that “there should be a special fund, which would cover their costs.” That, in the employer’s view, would also enable medical and rehabilitation centers

hire expert professionals to ensure quality diagnosing and treatment of patients (Employer “C”).

Another employer suggests that medical institutions “could implement programs, which are commissioned and, thus, funded by the government and which aim to help PWD recover their health.” (Employer “E”).

By helping to improve PWD health, those institutions can make a change (for instance, improve PWD mobility (Employers “G” and “I”).

4 employers addressed the issue of mass media. In their view, media can help in a number of important and effective ways.

To begin with, while recognizing the role of media, one employer, nevertheless, sees it as modest and secondary. According to that employer, “media can play a role only when new jobs are created” (Employer “C”).

Another employer takes a more positive view of the media’s role: “Media can identify and raise problems of vulnerable groups and can make people’s voices heard” (Employer “G”). It is an important point because the best policy decisions can be made only by taking into consideration the needs and views of the beneficiaries as spelled out by them and their representatives.

The third employer sees media role as very important. Media even could “probably become a link between employers and PWD.” Besides, media should produce more programs about PWD to inform general public about them and their problems (Employer “D”).

The fourth employer basically supports the same view. By informing “mass media can change people’s attitudes towards PWD so that interaction could become more informal.” More importantly, in the context of the PWD employment issue, the employer points out that due to media efforts, PWD, too, will feel more comfortable in personal and social interaction and will not hesitate to go out and to work” (Employer “B”).

Only three interviewed employers spoke about the role of educational institutions but they were very articulate on this point and advance interesting ideas.

One employer pointed out that problems with the education system are basically the same for PWD and non-disabled people. Institutions only give diplomas but do not guarantee jobs. Therefore, the employer finds that “labor market should dictate the education market what specialists are needed” (Employer “C”).

Another employer is confident that “educational institutions can play a major role.” It is noteworthy that the employer speaks about the transformative potential of education and its key role in professional as well as personal development. In that employer’s view, using certain educational programs, those institutions could teach even PWD with intellectual disabilities. In any case, it is the employers’ firm belief that “an educated person will always achieve something. If they have good knowledge and are skillful, they will find a job.” By providing PWD with, for instance, computer skills and formal education it will be possible to make excellent specialists of PWD who will get jobs (Employer “I”).

The third employer first of all suggests that all educational institutions enroll PWD for free. Education will have a defining impact on their future development. In that employer's words, "Now, most of PWD learn from practice and are autodidacts. If they get formal education, they will become better specialists and the likelihood of finding a job will be greater."

None of the employers spoke about SMEAs.

EC REPRESENTATIVES' VIEWS

Of 6 interviewed Employment Centers representatives one had no comments regarding the said entities, while the rest made from 1 to 4 comments each.

Unlike employers, EC representatives addressed the role that SMEAs could play. While only 2 of them spoke about SMEAs, they raised an important issue and provided helpful recommendations. One EC representative pointed out that SMEA *"should not specify a narrow list of occupations for the PWD because the SMEA doctor does not necessarily have adequate knowledge of all available and potential options and of all skills."* Therefore, the EC representative suggests introducing a special program of working with PWD, which would involve a specialist on labor qualifications (EC representative in region "B"). If introduced, that innovation could help expand the range of potential jobs and minimize undue restrictions on PWD choices.

The other EC representative made a similar point but focused on a different aspect of the issue. In the representative's view, when giving its expert conclusion about a PWD, the SMEA should be more specific outlining what work the PWD "can or cannot do". PWD with a respiratory tract problem is mentioned as an illustration. The SMEA should state in that case whether the PWD can work in a place with dust, smells, etc. (EC representative in region "F"). This is a good point not only because such an approach will expand PWD employment opportunities but it will also help to make EC activities more effective and better focused.

It is noteworthy that media received most attention (4 respondents), followed by education and church (each addressed by 3 respondents), while only 2 interviewed EC representatives spoke about medical institutions.

Since the interviewed EC representatives were asked to assess the role of **medical institutions** from the perspective of improving PWD employment chances, they focused primarily on the relationship between health and employment and on the potential of those institutions in improving the PWD health and, thus, their ability to work. In the words of one EC representative:

"The solution of health problems is a precondition for PWD to wish to get a job."

EC representative in region "D"

Therefore, the issue of assistance with defraying the costs of health services is of utmost importance because getting PWD health status to and maintain it at a level required for employment is a lengthy and not infrequently a costly process.

At the same time the EC representatives are aware that adequate health is a necessary but not sufficient condition for PWD employment. In terms of a possible impact by medical institutions there is another important factor, i.e. motivation grounded in self-confidence and a positive outlook. Those EC representatives do not fail to recognize that as they focus on motivation and a psychological rehabilitation issue:

“Medical centers can play a rather major role in rehabilitation, in particular, in psychological rehabilitation. It is a very important issue, which is often disregarded in this country because of the mentality. ... PWD should be helped to realize that disability is not the end, that it is simply a problem, which requires that steps be taken to solve it.”

EC representative in region “B”

As regards the role that **the church** might play, each of the three EC representatives who addressed it underscored a specific aspect of the church’s possible intervention.

One EC representative believes that the church could play a more instrumental role “by focusing on employers and raising their awareness.” (EC representative in region “E”).

The second representative also speaks about a more active stance that the church can take but focuses on the implementation of special, targeted projects for PWD. (EC representative in region “B”).

The third representative sees the church as an employer that “can offer some paying jobs to PWD” as a form of support. (EC representative in region “F”).

The same number of EC representatives commented on how to enhance the role of educational institutions in promoting PWD employment. One representative regarded inclusive education as important because children with disability not only get proper education and are not secluded (at home but also the attitude of the general public is changing and such children are to a greater extent now perceived in the same way as non-disabled persons. (EC representative in region “D”). It follows from this comment that the EC representative sees the contribution of educational institutions in preparing PWD academically, socially and psychologically full life in the society, including their taking on a productive role through employment, and in changing public perceptions and stereotypes that currently impede PWD employment.

An EC representative from another region points out that “educational institutions should be more focused on the labor market demands.” (EC representative in region “F”). That measure will be even more effective, if complemented by introduction of quotas for PWD for concrete occupations.

The third representative also notes this aspect but details it further:

“Educational institutions can contribute to PWD capacity building and to their advanced training by implementing various educational and training programs. They could also offer vocational training courses teaching crafts.” Thus, vocational training centers for PWD could be established to teach them crafts so as “to make them competitive on the labor market.”

EC representative in region “E”

As regards **media**, its role is seen in more active *information dissemination* and *public awareness-raising*. In one EC representative words: “Media has an important role in educating, informing and telling about Government decrees.” While ECs have brochures that they disseminate and give information during interviews with PWD, it is not enough, even when they work together with NGOs. However, using mass media is costly. Therefore, ECs should make use of any opportunity that comes their way (e.g. interviews that newspapers or TV companies ask them to give) to raise PWD employment issues. (EC representative in region “B”).

Another EC representative urges media to often provide coverage of PWD issues because it boosts PWD self-confidence.

While more frequent provision of coverage of PWD issues is helpful in and of itself, more importantly, as an EC representative from another region put it, “media can help disseminate relevant information in a timely fashion about programs so that PWD can make use of them.” (EC representative in region “F”).

The fourth EC representative mentions a different aspect pointing out that in cooperation with ECs, media can inform employers about PWD who qualify for and can fill certain positions. (EC representative in region “C”).

(iv) LOCAL AND/OR INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

PWD VIEWS

Only two PWD respondents (both female) did not know about foundations. As one of them put it:

“I am not aware of foundations. I don’t know what international foundations exist and what they do; therefore, I can’t say what they could do.”

57-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

The other “blamed” her lack of knowledge on social isolation of PWD:

“One has to have knowledge about foundations to be able to say something. Since we are isolated from the society at large, I do not know what they could do for us.”

43-year-old female respondent from Yerevan

Several other respondents were either skeptical of foundations

“I don’t think foundations ... can do anything.”

36-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

or downright critical of them:

“Various foundations don’t do anything at all for PWD.”

59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

Another respondent criticizes foundations for *unwillingness* to help PWD:

“They could provide financial and psychological assistance but they don’t.”

59-year-old female respondent from Gavar

Criticisms are leveled against foundations also for *lack of control* and supervision over the parties implementing the projects they fund:

“Foundations must control how the money that they give is spent; otherwise, the money is pocketed and ordinary people get nothing. Foundations, however, are told that their money was spent on people.”

43-year-old male respondent from Gavar

They are also criticized for *ineffective operation* and *mismanagement*:

“Based on my experience of contacts with them, foundations and in general international projects for PWD in Armenia for the most part engage themselves only in conducting seminars and present very simplistic things during those seminars. ... They should engage in concrete, more practical undertakings and spend money on them. I think that stricter control should be exercised over those foundations and projects so that the money is used more efficiently.”

51-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

On the subject of what foundations can do to help with the solution of the PWD employment problem, 17 (8 women and 9 men) out of the 23 respondents, who provided comments at all, spoke exclusively about *assistance, charity and support, including healthcare and rehabilitation. Regular financial assistance and support through allowances, allocation of some of the money that they raise, donation of food, other forms of charity and provision of funding for surgeries were on those respondents’ “wish list.”*

Only two among the 17 respondents did not expect *permanent* or *entirely free* assistance or support from foundations. One suggestion was that foundations could provide temporary financial support to “help PWD ensure at least the minimum living standards to their families until PWD get a job and will be able to support their families on their own.” (34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan). This recommendation, however, does not outline the specific terms and conditions of the support, including its duration.

The other concerned interest-free loans to PWD to purchase housing:

“Foundations could lend money to those PWD who have housing problems and then PWD will gradually return those sums.”

54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

The implementation of this idea would entail close cooperation between participating foundations and the government, possibly the involvement of banks with all ensuing conditionalities (collaterals, etc.) and complexities.

Thus, only 6 (4 men and 2 women) of the 23 respondents spoke about employment-related issues. Three of them believed that foundations should provide or create jobs to those PWD who can work (18-year-old male respondent from Gavar; 62-year-old female respondent from Gavar and 43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan).

Another respondent regarded foundations not as charities but rather as entities that could help PWD find employment:

“Foundations could help PWD not by giving alms but by assisting with job placement so that people could earn their livelihoods.”

31-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

Two other respondents saw foundations as potential sources of funding for PWD entrepreneurs. The first one focused primarily on business start-up initiatives:

“They [foundations] could provide funding and possibly some people could benefit and start up a business.”

58-year-old female respondent from Gavar

The second one was more specific and spoke about soft loans to PWD entrepreneurs to expand their businesses:

“Foundations could provide funding on preferential terms to PWD business projects so that PWD would be able to go ahead with their businesses and to subsequently get income pay and taxes.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

Out of 5 **landmine victims** who gave their opinion about the role of foundations 4 spoke only about material or financial assistance. Only one LM victim said that foundations “should create jobs for PWD.” (43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan).

EMPLOYERS’ VIEWS

Employers did not advance many ideas regarding the role of foundations. 2 of the 9 interviewed employers said nothing at all, while three others were unsure. On the latter believed foundations “could provide support through health and social services” (Employer “H”), the second that “foundation must help as much as they can” (Employer “B”), while the third held also a negative view of them:

“Foundations have quite a lot of money and do not know what they should spend it on”

Employer “G”

Only 4 of the 9 employers mentioned the role of foundations in securing employment for PWD. In the words of one employer:

“Foundations can probably create jobs”

Employer “D”

The three others were more specific about the line of action that foundations could take. To begin with, “foundations could fund entrepreneurs and employers to create jobs because creation of jobs for PWD requires investments. It is difficult to organize work for PWD and to work with them” (Employer “E”). At the same time, foundations could do more than merely donate money to that cause:

“They can set up a fund and make investments. For instance, they can set up a textile mill and hire only PWD women”

Employer “C”

While this idea is acceptable as a temporary special measure, it may not necessarily prove practicable or attractive for employers or PWD or other vulnerable groups. In order not to segregate PWD or some of their sub-groups (in this case a gender-based sub-group) and not to discriminate, however inadvertently, against other vulnerable groups (e.g. poor women and men, rural women, refugees, and other migrants, etc.), it is advisable to use other forms of preferential treatment and targeted interventions, such as quotas, creation of the environment where both PWD and non-PWD employees could work and interact productively.

Therefore, the approach proposed by the third employer seems more promising and effective. In this employer’s opinion, initiatives can take different forms. Foundations can implement various projects to create jobs both for PWD and non-disabled people: “They can set up enterprises and production units involving PWD” (Employer “I”).

EC REPRESENTATIVES’ VIEWS

EC representatives came up with a number of different ideas concerning the role of foundations in improving the PWD employment situation. Foundations could, for example, use financial incentives and financial leverage to encourage the creation of jobs for PWD (EC representative in region “C”). Their focus can also be on implementation of projects aimed at PWD job placement (EC representative in region “B”).

One EC representative believes that foundations should not only go on with drawing up and implementing projects aimed at PWD job placement but also “write and submit relevant reports that will serve as a foundation for programs targeting PWD” (EC representative in region “E”).

Two other EC representatives emphasized the role of foundations in providing training, particularly vocational training, that will benefit PWD (EC representatives in regions “D” and “B”).

Another option for foundations is to support PWD entrepreneurship. According to one EC representative, foundations can provide additional incentives; in particular they “can promote PWD small and medium businesses in rural areas” (EC representative in region “D”).

Finally, in the opinion of yet another EC representative, foundations can play a major, more direct and active. In the words of that representative:

“If each foundation hires at least one PWD, we will no longer have a PWD employment problem. Only good will is needed.”

EC representative in region “F”

It remains to be seen, however, how foundations will react to this interesting idea, which is far from being trivial or inconsequential.

(v) LOCAL AND/OR INTERNATIONAL NGOs (INCLUDING THOSE DEALING WITH PWD ISSUES)

PWD VIEWS

Of the 25 PWD respondents who answered this question, 2 (a male and a female) were positive about NGOs and appreciated their activities, although not related to PWD employment issues. Since “NGOs dealing with PWD issues are doing quite a good job,” including “different study and hobby groups, languages teaching groups, sports clubs” (33-year-old male respondent from Yerevan) and since “whatever is done for PWD is done by NGOs” it is not surprising that in their view NGOs should go on with their projects” (58-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor).

One respondent was hypercritical of, in fact very negative about local NGOs in general, making no reference whatsoever to PWD employment issues:

“They [local NGOs] misappropriate a lot of funds. International organizations give them money but no results can be seen, as they misappropriate the money.”

42-year-old male respondent from Gavar

8 (5 women and 3 men) spoke about issues that are not related to employment. Not surprisingly, most of them were in the oldest age group (57 or older; only one respondent was 38-year-old) and their focus was on the assistance that NGOs can provide (preferably regularly) to PWD, including financial and material assistance, allowances, high calorie food or some other unspecified assistance.

4 respondents were either skeptical or positive but vague. Their skepticism stems from their perception of NGO mission, resources or potential. One respondent does not believe that NGOs can help because “they deal with cultural issues but not with employment issues” (58-year-old female respondent from Gavar). Others focus on lack of resources: “NGOs don’t have anything, do they, so that they could help?” (59-year-old female respondent from Gavar).

Thus, only 10 (7 men and 3 women) respondents offered concrete ideas as to how NGOs can help in the solution of the PWD employment-related problems. As evidenced by those numbers and the responses below, men definitely gave more thought and assigned more significance to that issue than women.

One of the women in this group saw the role of NGOs in “the **creation of jobs** for PWD” (58-year-old female respondent from Gyumri). Since she did not elaborate further, the most likely option could be NGOs hiring PWD as permanent staff or as temporary employees for specific projects.

The second female respondent said that local and international NGOs are well-placed to help eliminate obstacles to PWD employment. In her view, their primary role is in “helping PWD get **training for a new occupation**” (52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor).

The third female respondent believed that NGOs could be instrumental in restoring or maintaining PWD **ability to work** by providing healthcare services through targeted projects (57-year-old female respondent from Gyumri).

Male respondents came up with more diverse and numerous ideas regarding the NGO role. They, too, supported the ideas of healthcare services and of provision of training to develop PWD skills. Other ideas ranged from assistance with finding a job or an occupation to establishing a meeting place for PWD to strengthening links between employers and PWD.

It is noteworthy that NGOs are assigned a role of a **mediating structure** between employers and PWD. That would be particularly helpful in finding employment for PWD because usually PWD “are not aware of any job vacancies” (35-year-old male respondent from Artashat).

Since many PWD need moral support and their self-confidence boosted to get on the labor market, NGOs can play an important role by “**implementing psychological projects** to help PWD” (25-year-old male respondent from Gavar).

Another interesting idea was provision of a meeting point for PWD:

NGOs “can set up a small organization where PWD could get together, hold meetings and discussions, draw up projects, advance and develop ideas based on their professional experience.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

In his view, the center should not be far from the PWD place of residence and transportation arrangements should be made for persons with mobility impairment.

While important in terms of boosting PWD social life and interaction and, potentially, of improving their situation, the center can hardly be visualized as too effective a tool in securing a job placement for or providing a relevant training to PWD.

Landmine victims

Only 5 out of 10 interviewed landmine victims commented on this issue. Their views for the most part coincided with or at least did not differ much from the views of other PWD respondents.

They spoke about the necessity for NGOs **to assist** in the *solution* of PWD employment-related problems (43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan), the *implementation of healthcare projects* by NGOs (53-year-old male respondent from Yerevan), which would improve PWD health status and, thus, their chances to get a job, and in organizing PWD free time and engaging them in some activities, especially those who stay at home all day long and “feel imprisoned” (37-year-old male respondent from Yerevan).

A very important aspect that was brought up in connection with NGOs only by a landmine victim respondent is their involvement in making sure employed PWD feel comfortable and are treated decently:

“It will be good, if the workplaces are adjusted to PWD needs, including short working hours, weekend days as days off, and a decent pay.”

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

The notable exception in the subgroup of respondents was a female landmine victim took a **skeptical stance** regarding the ability of NGOs to help PWD with employment. In her words:

“It is primarily the responsibility of the government since they have power in their hands. ... NGOs might want to do something but they do not have a potential to help us.”

43-year-old female respondent from Yerevan

EMPLOYERS' VIEWS

6 out of 9 interviewed employers answered this question. Some of them believe that NGOs can help PWD with medical treatment and rehabilitation (e.g. by sending PWD to sanatoria) and with provision of psychological support (Employers “H” and “D”).

Those interventions can indeed be seen as factors improving PWD employment chances as are various events (Employer “E”) to be staged for information and other purposes.

Projects that NGOs can undertake in that field are also seen as a factor contributing to job creation, provided those projects “yield real results” (Employer “B”). This is an important point for that respondent because in their estimation some NGO projects are “merely money-making initiatives.”

Two interviewed employers saw the NGO role in collaboration with employers and their associations (Employers “I” and “D”).

Finally, one employer spoke about the NGO role at length. To begin with, they can study and assess the current situation and submit their recommendations regarding employment opportunities for PWD and thus they can make an impact. Moreover, given the number of PWD and the types of disability they can make specific suggestions as to what kind of companies should be set up to provide employment for PWD (Employer “C”).

EC REPRESENTATIVES’ VIEWS

Only 3 EC representatives spoke about the role of NGOs and they made very few suggestions. One representative regards their role as the same as that of foundations. Therefore, in that representative’s view, NGOs should focus, firstly, on projects aimed at PWD job placement and, secondly, on provision of training to PWD (EC representative in region “B”).

Another EC representative, too, drew a parallel between NGOs and foundations and thought that if each NGO, as well as each foundation, hired at least one PWD, there would no longer be a PWD employment problem (EC representative in region “F”).

The third representative believed that NCOs should cooperate with Employment Centers and should conduct negotiations with employers. NGOs could also stage joint conferences with ECs to publicly discuss the obstacles for employers to hire PWD (EC representative in region “E”).

(vi) OTHER ENTITIES

All three groups of the respondents had an option to mention other entities, if they wished to do so, and to specify their roles.

Very few suggestions were made.

Most of the **PWD respondents** offered no ideas regarding other entities that could potentially play any role in helping with PWD employment. In fact only 3 PWD respondents (two men and one woman) made any comment at all. One respondent mentioned individual entrepreneurs, who, in her view, “can play some role, albeit a minor one” (52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor).

Another respondent pointed at the prosecutor’s office. In his view, that office “could find out who misappropriates funds allocated for the solution of PWD problems” (42-year-old male respondent from Gavar).

Since the PWD health status is important for employment and since not all branches of medical science and clinical medicine are at a high level in Armenia, the third PWD respondent suggested that there should be special programs that would make it possible for the country’s medical centers to refer PWD to clinics abroad for treatment (51-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor).

Only 2 **employers** spoke about the role of other entities.

One of them believes that employers themselves, especially in the field of light industry, can play a role, if they would wish to do so. The respondent specifies that their wish “depends

on the support of State bodies”, i.e. they will be more willing to provide jobs to PWD in case of co-funding and joint projects (Employer “E”).

The other one speaks about big local companies and big international organizations. The big companies in the private sector, which organize a number of activities for PWD, can help. In the respondent’s view, they can “within the framework of corporate social responsibility finance or co-finance various PWD employment-related projects.” As regards big international organizations that have their foundations that fund development projects in developing countries, they can fund PWD employment projects (Employer “G”).

Three **Employment Center representatives** mentioned other entities but not necessarily specified their role. One representative thought that the Labor Exchange (placement) and EC could help (EC representative in region “C”). Another one merely said that for other entities “it is possible to promote PWD employment by raising employers’ awareness” (EC representative in region “E”). According to the third EC representative, “Professional Labor and Rehabilitation Centers can prove very useful for PWD job placement” as can be “the Employers’ Council, which periodically implements joint projects with the Employment Center” (EC representative in region “D”).

2. State Programs facilitating PWD employment

The State Employment Service Agency (SESA) has been implementing programs that promote, support and facilitate PWD employment. Their effectiveness depends, *inter alia*, on how well PWD are informed about and how many PWD make use of them. The survey findings clearly show that very few interviewed PWD were aware of those programs. More precisely, only 7 out of 50 respondents knew that the State Employment Service Agency implements such programs.

This lack of knowledge is typical of both women and men. Only slightly more women (4) than men (3) were aware of the programs and slightly fewer of them than men were not (20 and 23 respectively).

As regards the age of those 7 respondents, only one of them was young (a 31-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor), while 6 others were 51 years of age or older.

Most of the respondents who were aware of the programs were from Gyumri (4), followed by Vanadzor (2) and Gavar (1). None of the 20 respondents from Artashat and Yerevan were in this group.

One might reasonably expect that those unemployed PWD who were actively looking for a job and applying to get it would be more knowledgeable than those PWD who were not looking for a job. The findings, however, show that that is definitely not the case. The proportion of informed vs. uninformed respondents in both groups is practically the same: 1 to 8 in the former group and 3 to 25 in the latter group.

Only 2 out of 13 employed PWD were aware of those programs. So, it can be safely assumed that very few PWD got a job due to those programs. At least according to the findings of this study, none of the respondents has ever made use of those programs.

In terms of the programs' effectiveness, the following data raises even greater concern: only 3 out of 21 unemployed PWD were informed about the programs.

Thus, it can be concluded that among PWD there is a considerable lack of information and awareness concerning programs that aim to facilitate their employment. While awareness *per se* does not guarantee employment, it, nevertheless, in most cases is a *conditio sine qua non* for getting it.

As regards the employers, the situation is as follows: Only 4 out of 9 employers were aware of the State programs for regulation of PWD employment, and only one of those 4 ever made use of those programs. It means that relevant information does not reach employers (and, thus, there is a communication and information problem) and that when it does reach them, most employers are not particularly interested.

3. Cooperation between employers and State Employment Service Agency

One of the potentially effective ways to improve PWD employment chances is close cooperation between employers and the State Employment Service Agency. However, almost half of the interviewed employers had no cooperation with SESA. 4 employers (who represent companies) said that they either never had such experience ("never had any contacts or cooperation with SESA" – Employers "A", "G" and "H") or that it had never crossed their mind to do so. As one employer put it:

"We have not approached the State Employment Service Agency. When we had a vacancy, we did the search ourselves. I would not say that we did not need the SESA, simply it did not occur to us to do it."

Employer "B"

In the estimation of 5 other employers, their cooperation with the SES is satisfactory (3), or good (2). Those who regarded their cooperation with the SES as satisfactory pointed out "good partner relations" (Employer "E") but stressed that while they work with the SES "no PWD have been referred to" them (Employer "D") or that they had their own pool of qualified but currently unemployed specialists (because the company had been downsized in recent years). Thus, "while we know the SES and have good relations with it, we, nonetheless, did not apply to them because we did not need that" (Employer "C").

The two employers who regarded their cooperation with the SES as good were able to report some tangible results. Those can be seen as success stories and other stakeholders can build on that experience.

One company was instrumental in organizing Job Fairs in Yerevan and in Lori and Syunik regions in close cooperation with the SESA. Many PWD attended those fairs and some of them got jobs (Employer "I").

The other employer emphasized that their cooperation with the Employment Center was at an initial stage and that they had had a series of meetings, which had been attended also by NGOs dealing with PWD issues. Due to that cooperation "some PWD with appropriate knowledge and skills are referred to us for the positions that we open regularly" (Employer "F").

4. Vocational Education for PWD

Getting additional training, especially vocational or professional education, is a factor that improves employment chances. Therefore, the interviewed PWD were asked whether they would like to learn a new trade or profession. As evidenced by the data in the Table below, the number of those who do not want exceeds 1.6 times the number of those who do.

Do you want to learn any new trade/profession?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	19	38.0
No	31	62.0
Total	50	100.0

In contrast to men, among whom the number of those who want to learn a new trade/profession is equal to that of those who do not want, the number of women who want is three times lower than those who do not want to learn a new trade (See the Table below).

Respondents	Do you want to learn any new trade/profession?		Total
	Yes	No	
Men	13	13	26
Women	6	18	24
Total	19	31	50

The findings also indicate that inclination to learn a new trade is inversely correlated with age.

Do you want to learn any new trade/profession?	Age Group			Total
	18-35	36-50	51 and above	
Yes	5	6	8	19
No	3	4	24	31
Total	8	10	32	50

In other words, in the age groups of 18-50 the number of respondents who want to learn a new trade/ profession is consistently higher (overall 1.5 times) than those who do not.

Moreover, according to the survey data, the proportion of those who wish to learn a new trade vs. those who do not is much higher among the interviewees who hold paid jobs (7 vs.

6) than among the unemployed (6 vs. 15). One would expect that the unemployed would be more motivated and eager to learn a new trade than those who already have jobs. The situation reflected by the survey data can be accounted for mostly by the impact made by the age factor and, to a less extent, by the gender factor on the correlation between an employment status and willingness to learn a new trade. There is a significant presence of women in the group of unemployed interviewees and, more importantly, older respondents predominate numerically among the unemployed PWD interviewed for this study.

As regards landmine victims, they split into 2 equal groups of 5. Thus, the proportion of those who would like to learn a new trade is significantly higher among the landmine victims than the average in the entire group of interviewed PWD.

While 8 of the 19 respondents who would like to learn a new trade did not specify a concrete trade, were not sure what specific trade they would like to learn or were willing to learn any trade, others listed a number of trades, including sewing, knitting, woodworking, design, auto repair and maintenance, construction, computer operator, film editing, physics, stoneworking, etc.

From the policy perspective, it was also important to find out the underlying reasons of interviewed PWD's disinclination to learn a new trade/profession. 31 interviewees who said that they would not want to learn a new trade gave a number of reasons to explain their position. While most of them cited a single reason, several of them gave two or more reasons.

According to their responses, there are 2 primary reasons, viz. **age** and **health status**. 11 respondents mentioned their age as an important prohibiting factor. Not surprisingly, most of those respondents are in the age group of 54-62-year-olds. There was only one exception, when a 37-year-old man cited his age as an obstacle.

The most typical responses were:

<i>"It is already too late."</i>	62-year-old female respondent from Gyumri
<i>"I think my age is not appropriate for learning something new."</i>	57-year-old male respondent from Artashat
<i>"Age prevents me from learning. I can't learn."</i>	56-year-old male respondent from Gavar
<i>"I would like to learn crafts but not at my old age."</i>	54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

9 respondents pointed out at their health status as a reason.

Most responses here were as follows:

“Health problems prevent me from learning.”

58-year-old female respondent from Gyumri

“I would like to ... but my health does not let me; I physically cannot do it.”

36-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

In several instances it is disability that aggravates the health status and prevents the respondents from thinking about learning a new trade. As one interviewee put it:

“I would like to since it is never too late to learn. But opportunities are limited because of my disability.”

57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

7 respondents mentioned those two factors together. A PWD words say it all:

“Age and health problems prevent me from learning.”

58-year-old female respondent from Gavar

Three respondents said that they did not want to learn a new trade or profession because they already had one, which they liked. 2 of them are professionals. A 57-year-old female respondent from Gyumri is an accountant and has computer skills, so she can't imagine what else she could learn. A 51-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor is a newspaper editor and is quite happy with his profession.

3 of 5 **landmine victims** in this group pointed at *health* and *age* as primary factors, very much like other PWD. But 2 other landmine victims in this group mentioned reasons that were not given by other respondents.

One of them indicated that he could not afford time because of current employment:

“I cannot learn now because it is time-consuming. If I went to study, I would not be able to work as much as I do now and that would have an adverse effect on my income...”

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

The other one blamed an economic environment for his unwillingness to learn a new trade because in his view production does not make economic sense:

“I do not want to acquire new skills as I consider it ineffective. If as a result of training I start producing some items, I am not sure I can sell them. The market in our country is full and it would be very difficult to do business.”

51-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

As could be expected, age and health, or a combination thereof, are perceived by PWD to be the main obstacles to their learning a new trade or to their even considering such option.

Provision of training to PWD to help them learn a new trade will be effective, if it is provided to younger age groups of PWD (up to 40) and if beneficiaries do not have severe disability.

5. Job retention by PWD

While getting a job is very important for PWD, keeping it is no less important. Therefore, all three groups of major stakeholders were asked through an open-ended question to name factors that affect PWD job retention.

PWD VIEWS

This is a particularly important issue for PWD because not infrequently they are the first to be fired. **Health** and **age** figure prominently in their responses as factors that seriously (and mostly negatively) affect their chances of keeping their jobs.

Every fourth surveyed respondent mentioned **health problems** as a primary, if not the only factor. The following response pretty much sums it up:

“I think only health problems can have an impact on PWD getting and keeping a job.”

35- year-old male respondent from Artashat

Older PWD, especially women, tend to factor **age** as well into the equation:

“What matters is PWD health status and age.”

54- year-old female respondent from Gyumri

“I think only health problems and age can have an impact on PWD keeping a job.”

57- year-old female respondent from Gavar

Most respondents did not elaborate further on the subject of health; however, it is clear that the implication is that health problems have an adverse impact on PWD ability to work. While they do not dispute or question the right of the employer to dismiss PWD on the grounds of poor health, some of them seem to be aware of a fine line between discrimination and arbitrariness on the one hand and a legitimate decision, on the other. Their choice of words may be different but they clearly convey the message that employers use health reasons as a pretext for dismissing PWD. Besides, as a rule, they are the first to be dismissed. In the words of one respondent:

“PWD are the first to be fired because employers want young, healthy people.”

62-year-old female respondent from Gavar.

Another respondent put it in the following way:

“PWD are much more often fired on the grounds of their health status; employers say that the PWD state of health is not sufficient for the work.”

59-year-old female respondent from Gavar.

At the same time some respondents believe that maintaining the job is contingent on good work.

A 31-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor said that he is employed because he is a “conscientious and hard worker.”

He is seconded by a 37-year-old male respondent from Yerevan who is positive that PWD “will keep their jobs, if they work well and the administration sees that.”

Several respondents specified important components of or preconditions for being a good worker. Those include strong qualifications, enhanced professional capacities and skills. As one respondent put it:

“PWD’s capacities, abilities and professional skills are instrumental in keeping a job. You yourself have to work on it.”

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

Another important precondition for keeping one’s job is for “PWD to meet the requirements set by the employer” (33-year-old male respondent from Yerevan)

Another respondent mentioned the importance of discipline:

“PWD should not be late for work and should comply with the rules of discipline at work.”

62-year-old female respondent from Gyumri,

while a 25-year-old male respondent from Gavar stressed that PWD not only have to work well but also “to adapt to the social environment at the work place.”

Of course, if PWD could meet all those qualifications requirements, have tolerably well health and excel in ability, it would be an ideal situation, where they would definitely have fewer reasons to worry about their job security. However, for a number of reasons they can hardly be expected in most cases to outperform non-disabled employees, so some other factors are important too. Besides, we do not live in a perfect world. For example, nepotism is not a rare occurrence here. A 61-year-old female respondent from Gyumri speaks about favoritism, whereas another respondent, a 53-year-old female from Vanadzor, points out the advantages for PWD of being a relative or a friend of the employer and of having, as she put it, “good relations” with him.

Thus, while good work, discipline and conscious efforts to excel are important preconditions for PWD to be in good standing and make, at least in theory, employers

favorably disposed toward a PWD employee, yet respondents believe that other factors might also be at play. They do not necessarily specify them but point out the final outcome – the attitude. In a respondent’s words:

“I think the main factor for PWD to keep his job is the employer’s attitude towards him.”

40-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

When they do specify them, two closely related factors are mentioned. An appeal to employer’s conscience stands out here. As a 56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri put it, PWD keeping a job “is a matter of employer’s conscience.”

The second factor is patience, compassion and tolerance on the part of the employer:

“If the employer ... is patient with the PWD, the latter will keep his or her job.”

57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

“They [employers] employ PWD for a long time because they pity him. They say that in this way he can at least earn his livelihood.”

43-year-old male respondent from Gavar

Finally, it should be noted that favorable conditions are also believed to be necessary for PWD to keep their jobs. A 61-year-old female respondent from Gyumri stressed “adequate working conditions,” while a 62-year-old female respondent, also from Gyumri, raised the issue of transportation. In other words, while PWD can be qualified and hard-working employees and while employers can be understanding and supportive, nevertheless, adequate conditions, both on the work place and outside it, are necessary for PWD to be able to get to the work place and to do their job.

Landmine victims

While definitely a separate group of PWD, landmine victims for the most part do not differ much from other respondents regarding their views on the factors that affect PWD job retention. Like other respondents, they emphasized the importance of health, good, conscientious work, professional capacities and personal qualities as well as of an employer’s attitude. They, too, underscored the fact that sometimes, as a landmine victim pointed out:

“Employers claim that PWD cannot work and use that as a pretext to dismiss them”

53-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

The factor that was mentioned only by a LM victim interviewee is family and/or personal circumstances that may have an adverse impact on PWD keeping their jobs. While elaborating on a number of negative factors, she also said:

“those might be family circumstances ...; it may depend on whether PWD has a family or is unmarried; family conditions might have an impact...”

43-year-old female respondent from Yerevan

Colleagues' supportive attitudes

A social and psychological climate at a work place is an important factor for job retention in general and for PWD in particular. If a person does not feel comfortable among coworkers or, even worse, if he or she feels excluded and not a part of a team, it most certainly can have serious repercussions for PWD job retention prospects because overall climate, group dynamic and cohesiveness, interpersonal relations and communication significantly affect productivity and effectiveness among other things. Therefore, employed PWD were asked a question about colleagues' attitude towards them. 12 out of 13 employed PWD answered this question. It is noteworthy that both male and female PWD of all age groups were unanimous in their responses. In their estimation, the colleagues' attitudes towards them were either good or very good.

7 respondents said that the attitude was normal or good. The typical answers were:

“Attitude is good; there are no problems.”

25-year-old male respondent from Gavar

“Relations with colleagues in the work place are normal and good. I am not displeased.”

33-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

Five respondents said that colleagues' attitude was very good, friendly, respectful and warm. The typical answers were:

“All workers are very friendly.”

62-year-old female respondent from Artashat

“Warm, understanding and sincere working relations in our team.”

51-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

“Attitude is very good, respectful.”

59-year-old female respondent from Gavar

Landmine victims were no exception. 3 out of 4 employed landmine victims answered this question. All of them are men. 2 of them spoke of good, normal attitude and relations:

“The colleagues' attitude is normal, without discrimination.”

43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

“Relations are normal, I am not displeased. ... Colleagues’ attitude is good.”

34-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

The third respondent assessed his colleagues’ attitude as very friendly:

“In my working place all colleagues are very friendly with me...”

51-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

EMPLOYERS’ VIEWS

It is probably natural that *health* as a factor should not figure prominently in employers’ responses. In fact, it was mentioned only once, and *en passant* at that. It is probably assumed that PWD health is sufficiently good and does not interfere with their work, or else they would not have been hired in the first place.

Not surprisingly, employers focus first and foremost on quality of performance. Virtually all interviewed employers pointed at “good work” as a factor that helps PWD keep their jobs:

“If PWD does his work well, he will retain his job.”

Employer “B”

“... If the PWD works well, he will not be dismissed.”

Employer “D”

Some employers elaborated further on that score outlining *personal qualities* that make possible good work. These related factors include hard, conscientious work, experience, long years of service in the company, discipline and abidance by the norms set by the employer. Also important in that context are, as one employer pointed out, “PWD great willpower and desire to work” (Employer “ ”). Therefore, in that employer’s view, psychological support is an important factor as it can help PWD build self-confidence and become more disposed to work, while another employer underscores the importance of providing an adaptation period for PWD starting employment (Employer “F”).

To make PWD even more competitive one employer suggests that they “should periodically take care of their professional growth and take professional development courses” (Employer “I”).

Another important factor that was stressed a number of times is *employer’s goodwill*. In the words of one respondent: “The employer is well-disposed towards PWD, otherwise he would not have hired them” (Employer “E”). The goodwill is basically underlain by humanitarian considerations because employers are not obligated by law to hire or keep PWD, especially when those were given a disability group and allowance:

“It is the socioeconomic situation of the PWD that forces the employer to keep him employed because no one can survive on the disability allowance. That person would face famine.”

Employer “C”

The company’s culture has a prominent role to play in nurturing this goodwill. As one employer put it:

“The company’s internal culture plays a big role in this issue, how kindly and well-wishing the employers are.”

Employer “F”

It will definitely sustain also a good attitude of other employees, which one employer identified as an important factor (Employer “A”).

Another employer brought up an interesting new angle concerning the issue: employers can be interested in having PWD employees (in case, of course, of “their effective work” and of “their use of their potential to the maximum”) because, as he put it:

“... that will make a positive impact on the image of the company in question”

Employer “G”

This is a clear indication that ideas of socially responsible business and of the importance of projecting a positive image with general public are no longer mere abstractions but are gradually taking root in this society.

While effective and conscientious work of PWD and employers’ benevolence are appreciated as factors, at the same time respondents indicate that the government should step up its support to PWD employment. One employer spoke specifically about quotas as an effective measure that would help PWD keep their jobs (Employer “H”).

EC REPRESENTATIVES’ VIEWS

Employment Center representatives mentioned very few factors. Most of them focused primarily on worker’s knowledge, skills and abilities, which are, in fact, an important factor for any employees, whether disabled or non-disabled, to keep their jobs. As one EC representative put it:

“The main factor is personal capacity and abilities.”

EC representative in region “D”

The factor of professional expertise figures so prominently that at times it obscures all others or even, as an EC representative claimed, is *the only* one:

“Professional expertise is the only factor in job retention. ... If the PWD knowledge is sufficient, I have not heard that disability is a problem for the employer who would then dismiss the PWD on those grounds. This is true for all three sectors” [public, private and NGO].

EC representative in region “F”

A closely related factor is PWD ability to meet employers’ requirements:

“PWD employees must meet employers’ requirements.”

EC representative in region “D”

In addition, to be competitive, PWD should make consistent efforts at gaining more knowledge and improving their skills. In the words of an EC representative:

“In any case, ... PWD must increase their knowledge and improve skills since present-day changes are very dynamic and they should keep abreast of the times.”

EC representative in region “D”

Therefore, another factor is education, which is an important means to that end. As an EC representative put it:

“... professional development and training are so important for job retention.”

EC representative in region “E”

While those factors are important *per se*, employer’s awareness that PWD are endowed with those abilities and that they have necessary knowledge and skills is no less important. The same EC representative pointed out that:

“Employer’s appreciation of PWD skills and abilities is very important for job retention.”

EC representative in region “E”

Favorable environment for PWD employees was also mentioned. It includes adaptation of work places and a positive attitude of employers and fellow employees. Therefore, that should become a part of the company’s culture and reflected in its policy and practices. An EC representative put it succinctly:

“The company should have a PWD-oriented policy.”

EC representative in region “A”

This culture of acceptance and equality is all the more important because there are few, if any, effective mechanisms for ensuring PWD job security. EC representatives pointed out that EC, for one, have no powers. As an EC representative indicated, EC have neither control mechanisms nor leverage, even what regards information. Under the law, that

employer can but is not required to provide information about vacancies, upcoming structural changes, keep EC informed, etc. (EC representative in region “C”).

The interviewed EC representatives noted that PWD employees are protected quite well by law only in the public service. In the private sector employees can easily be dismissed. Even Labor Inspectorate “does not have serious powers in that regard.” “The only recourse in unfair dismissal is the court of law.” (EC representative in region “B”). The problem, however, is that it is very difficult to prove “unfairness” in the court of law.

Gender aspects in job retention

PWD VIEWS

When asked whether women or men with disabilities are fired more often, 11 out of 50 surveyed PWD said they do not know, while 31 contended that gender plays no role. It is noteworthy that the share of female and male respondents who think so is virtually the same.

The respondents, who believe that gender does not play any role when a decision is made to dismiss a PWD employee, constitute a vast majority. In fact, over 6 out of every 10 respondents hold that view, where as fewer than two think that gender is an important factor in that decision-making.

On the other hand, only 8 respondents believe that there is gender-based discrimination in hiring, with 4 of them pointing at women and the other 4 – at men with disabilities as victims of discrimination. It is noteworthy that women respondents in this group see female PWD as the only victims of gender-based discrimination and 2 men also support that view, while two other men believe that male PWD face gender-based discrimination more often in firing decisions.

Among 10 **landmine victims** only two held the view that there is gender-based discrimination, with female PWD being the victims, while one respondent did not know and 7 said that gender is not related at all in those decisions.

EMPLOYERS’ VIEWS

Most employers firmly believe that there factors that affect PWD job retention have the same impact on women and men. They stated unambiguously that there is no difference at all. The most typical explanations were:

“There is no difference in terms of gender. ... What matters is professional qualities. Gender has nothing to do here.”

Employer “C”

(job retention) *“depends on being a good specialist; it does not matter whether it is woman or man.”*

Employer “H”

One employer had mixed feelings:

“Female PWD can be regarded as a more preferable employee, if the job is related to women’s activities (e.g. in a sewing workshop or in some segments of the services sector). But I do not think that preference is given based on gender. I would be more inclined to think that woman is mother and keeps children and would give preference to a woman. Not infrequently, they do not have a family; they should be helped.”

Employer “I”

In other words, while he does not believe that preference is given on the basis of gender, he himself would not dismiss a female PWD employee. This decision would be based on the consideration of her socioeconomic and social situation, i.e. it would be made on humanitarian grounds.

Another employer is more inclined to favor men. His line of reasoning is as follows:

“Interaction with a disabled woman is more difficult with a disabled man.”

Employer “B”

It can be assumed that if faced with an alternative of dismissing a male or female PWD, the employer in question will definitely keep a male PWD employee.

EC REPRESENTATIVES’ VIEWS

Most EC representatives believe that there are no differences (at least, no significant differences) for male and female PWD in terms of job retention. In the words of one EC representative:

“I do not see any difference in case of women.”

EC representative in region “F”

Another EC representative even went so far as to claim that:

“I do not think that there is any gender discrimination in our society.”

EC representative in region “A”

At the same time EC representatives point out that if there are any differences, they are due to the nature of the work. But this is the problem faced by PWD at the time of hiring not when they are already employed.

There was only one special case, when one EC representative claimed that while “for the time being no difference is felt”, it is still too early to say. He thus states his position:

“First, the problems common for both sexes, especially for persons with physical and mobility impairment, should be identified and solved. Only then we will be able to understand, if there are any differences. We have not solved those common problems yet (comfortable working conditions, workload, physical accessibility of the workplace, appropriate restroom facilities, etc.).”

EC representative in region “B”

It is an interesting perspective, which highlights numerous problems faced by PWD of both sexes seeking employment and which tends to imply that gender-based differences are secondary now and will remain such for some time to come. It postulates that it is only when the existing disability-based imbalance has been redressed, it will be possible to see whether there is also a gender-based imbalance.

This perspective, however, does not take into consideration the fact of multiple discrimination faced by female PWD and postponing not only the solution but even the discussion of their special needs and problems will merely place them at a greater disadvantage.

PWD Entrepreneurship

The overall well-being, socioeconomic situation and status of PWD depend to a large extent not only on their employment but also on their self-employment and entrepreneurship. Adequate attention and support to PWD self-employment and entrepreneurship are a promising policy option that can and should complement efforts aimed to expand PWD employment opportunities. To be effective, this policy option should, *inter alia*, take into consideration the opinions and sentiments of PWD. Before starting the formulation of policy to promote PWD entrepreneurship, the policy-makers should first of all find out whether PWD would be willing and inclined to start a business and if yes, on what conditions and in what sphere.

The PWD interviewed in the course of this survey were asked whether they would start their own business, if they could get a low-interest loan. 24 of the 50 surveyed PWD answered in the affirmative, 25 in the negative and 1 gave no response.

It is noteworthy that while the interviewees were not asked to explain why they were or were not inclined to start a business (provided they are given a soft loan), five of them (all males) on their own initiative stated their reasons for not favoring the option of starting a business. Basically, it all boils down to the *lack* of enabling economic environment (as a result of which there is fierce competition and many business ventures fail) and of supportive legal framework and *fear* of banks.

One respondent put it quite succinctly:

“It is very difficult to get income by starting up a business since the State does not give opportunities for developing small and medium-size businesses and taxes are very high.”

59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

As regards fear, another respondent was quite persuasive:

“Loans are always scary. Nothing is stable these days. I tried to do business at some point. I started selling shoes. The business failed; those shoes are still in our home. If my wife had not gone to Russia to work, we would not have been able to repay the loan.”

36-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

Two **landmine victims** were in this group. One elaborated on the subject of fear:

“I am afraid to take out a loan in Armenia. Taxes are so high that it is difficult to carry on business. Secondly, I will not take that risk because if I fail to repay the loan, they will seize my home.”

37-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

The other touched upon more general root causes, while explaining why he would not be interested, even if given a loan:

“No, ...because unfair treatment, failure to provide equal competition and the bias and unfairness of the judicial system do not allow even to begin thinking about starting a business.”

43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

According to the data, men are more inclined to start their own business than women: 15 men would start their business on those terms vs. 11 who would not, while women’s responses are almost a mirror image of those of men: only 9 women would start their business on those terms vs. 14 who would not.

Willingness to start a business does not depend on **age** and, mostly, on **marital status** of the PWD respondents. **Education** is for the most part not a factor either, with a minor exception of higher education. Out of 13 respondents with higher education 8 would like to start their own business, while 5 would not.

Employment status on the whole does not determine whether PWD would like to start their own business or not, with the exception of the unemployed. While one might assume that most, if not all, unemployed would like to make use of that opportunity to become gainfully occupied and to create a source of income. According to the data, however, that is not the case. Only 8 out of 21 surveyed unemployed PWD replied that they would like to start their own business. 13 unemployed PWD said that they would not want to have their own business. The fact that women are more reluctant to start a business than men is only a part of the explanation (out of 7 unemployed female PWD only 1 would want to start her own business, while 6 would not like). Unemployed men were only moderately interested. Thus, as to whether they would like to start their own business the overall number of unemployed male PWD (14) was split into two equal parts, with, on the one hand, 7 respondents saying they would like that and, on the other hand, 7 respondents saying that they would not.

As regards **landmine victims**, 5 of them would like and 5 others would not like to start their own business. The number of paid employees and the unemployed is divided virtually equally among them. The only interesting difference is that the only housewife among them answered the said question in the affirmative.

Those 24 PWD respondents who would like to start a business were asked then to specify what business they would like to start. 23 shared their opinions.

6 respondents were **uncertain** about what business they would start, yet they would like to give it a try. The business could be in production or services, and one respondent even emphasized a strong intellectual component and focus on innovations. What matters most for those PWD is for their business to generate a good income. A typical response was along the following lines:

“I would like to have my own business. I cannot what business specifically. It should generate good income.”

31-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

Seven PWD focused on *small-scale production*, including 3 PWD who spoke about agricultural production. It could be bakery, confectionery or production of chairs, polyethylene or shoes. As one respondent put it:

“I would like to start a small shoe-making business. I like that field and I have necessary skills.”

52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

According to another respondent:

“I would like to start a business, where I would use my professional education, say, producing chairs...”

42-year-old male respondent from Gavar

Agricultural production included starting a farm or mushroom production. In the words of one respondent:

He “would like to start a chicken farm...”

25-year-old male respondent from Gavar

Five other PWD would like to open a small shop. They mentioned mostly grocery, fruits and vegetables or flower shops. A typical answer was:

“... I would like to open a small shop.”

47-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

“My husband has experience in floriculture, so I would love to open a small flower shop.”

52-year-old female respondent from Artashat

The remaining 5 PWD would prefer the services sector. The proposed services range from tailoring and hairdressing to designer schools and computer club. The typical responses of the interviewed PWD in this group were:

“I would like to start a designer school...”

33-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

“I would like to start a computer club...”

18-year-old male respondent from Gavar

“I would like to open a hairdressing salon.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

“I would very much like to engage in tailoring.”

57-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

Men in this group of 23 respondents displayed some preference for production followed by small retail trade and services. **Women** clearly preferred services and small retail trade, while production was definitely not on their priority list. The proportion of individuals who would like to start a business but who have not yet made up their mind as to the specific sector and occupation is basically the same among women and men.

There were four landmine victims in this group, all men. They were all eager to engage in business. Only one of them could not immediately pinpoint a specific occupation, although he outlined the preferred sphere. As a young person with higher education, he would like to start a company, for instance in a software development field, that would attract “smart young people, including PWD, who would like to invest their knowledge and intellectual potential into our country’s development.” (33-year-old male respondent from Yerevan).

Two **landmine victims** focused on production: polyethylene and mushrooms respectively.

The fourth landmine victim opted for the service sector, as he “would like to open a small table tennis club for children...” (40-year-old male respondent from Yerevan).

It is clear that very few, if any, PWD considered as serious an opportunity of starting their own business. Therefore, most of them had not given the idea a serious thought. When asked, most of them were unprepared. That is the reason why not infrequently they *came up* with unrealistic or exceedingly ambitious ideas or *were uncertain* or *had* no business plans.

It is also clear that with modest financial support and encouragement through the Government policy aimed to create an enabling environment for PWD entrepreneurship quite a few PWD will start up a business and will become financially self-sufficient and productive members of the society, contributing to economic growth and decreasing the pressure on limited resources that the State budget can allocate for the solution of numerous problems encountered by PWD.

Obstacles to PWD entrepreneurship

In order to be able to design effective policies aimed to promote PWD entrepreneurship and self-employment it is necessary not only to *probe the target group’s attitudes*, intentions

and sentiments vis-à-vis the prospects of their involvement in that sphere (in this survey it was a question of starting their own business, if given a soft loan) but also to gauge the PWD opinions on the obstacles (real or perceived) faced by PWD entrepreneurs.

The question about obstacles was given to all interviewed PWD and even though the question was not simple, the response rate was high, as 44 respondents answered it. At the same time, 17 respondents (9 women and 8 men) said that they do not know or that it is difficult for them to answer that question. 15 of them were over 51 years of age. They do not know because they did not think about it and/or do not have a relevant experience. As one respondent put it:

“I have never tried entrepreneurship. I have no idea whatsoever about it.”

57-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

Twenty-seven respondents gave one or at times two or more answers that outline a broad range of problems in the economic, legal, policy, social, health, etc. spheres. Many of those problems are root causes of PWD inability or reluctance to get involved in entrepreneurship.

Six respondents (3 men and 3 women) said that problems are the same for all entrepreneurs, whether they have disability or not. As one of them put it:

“PWD entrepreneurs face the same problems as all other entrepreneurs. I do not see any difference. It is difficult to repay loans and to make business profitable.”

36-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

In other words:

“There are no obstacles because of disability.”

58-year-old female respondent from Gavar

Another female respondent contended that

“PWD entrepreneurs do not have particular obstacles if they are knowledgeable and skillful in their business.”

61-year-old female respondent from Gyumri

However, disability as a negative factor cannot be discounted. 4 respondents (including one woman) argue that there are health- and, more specifically, disability-related obstacles. Disability has negative psychological repercussions as well for PWD entrepreneurs, as they feel awkward or dejected. One respondent explained that in some detail:

“In any case, a PWD entrepreneur feels more dejected than a non-disabled person, who is capable of moving around quickly, of communicating with people, etc. People with locomotor disability face even more problems because ramps are non-existent in many places, thus it impossible for PWD to get into those places on their own. That results in waste of time and causes inconvenience. Problems also arise in inter-personal relations: if a PWD does not feel equal to other people that have an adverse impact on his business affairs.”

56-year-old male respondent from Gyumri

However, without question, as to the respondents, the number one problem for PWD entrepreneurship is high taxes. It was mentioned by 12 respondents (6 women and 6 men). One male respondent summed it up

“Taxes are the problem faced by self-employed and entrepreneur PWD. If taxes become lower, people will see that their businesses yield profit. People should have money after paying taxes so that they could be confident they can do that business. People take out a loan but since taxes are high, the business makes no economic sense, even if a soft loan is offered.”

38-year-old male respondent from Vanadzor

He is seconded by a female respondent who says that “paying taxes from the very beginning can result in bankruptcy.” (52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor)

As another responded pointed out, taxes are not only high, they are numerous:

“Tax-related problems are numerous; taxes are too many. People cannot work and support their families. Taxes have to be lowered.”

63-year-old female respondent from Gavar

Not infrequently, high taxes were mentioned in conjunction with some other problem such as high rent, lack of available space, corruption, unfair competition and problems with the sale of produced goods.

Four respondents (2 women and 2 men) mentioned lack of financial resources, especially for an initial investment, as a serious obstacle:

“Lack of financial resources...” (47-year-old male respondent from Gyumri) and “initial investment is the problem.” (52-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor)

On the whole, nine respondents pointed at the **State policies and practices** as constituting a formidable obstacle to PWD entrepreneurship. To begin with, some PWD argue that there is no State support. As one respondent put it:

“In this country they say ... ‘You are on your own.’ That is why you are left to your own devices: there is no support.”

42-year-old male respondent from Gavar

In another PWD respondent's view, the State policy is far from being helpful:

"The State does not give help. The State is the obstacle. Both getting loans from banks and opening a limited liability company present difficulties. ... I have not heard about any privilege granted to PWD..."

33-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

In fact, the environment for PWD entrepreneurs is oppressive:

"They don't let an entrepreneur do business; they put all sorts of pressure and impose very high taxes."

59 year-old female respondent from Gyumri

Not only the high interest rates set by banks are not checked but also the playing field is not leveled for all players:

"Obstacles are high interest rates on loans, small businesses that are started up will not be able to survive the current competition environment and, failing to yield profit, will eventually be closed..."

59- year-old male respondent from Gyumri

The Government does little to stop corruption and other unhealthy practices of the officials who abuse their power, which are a result of overregulation:

"There is too much supervision these days. If you want to do your business slightly more actively, you will be visited by a tax inspector, a fire safety inspector, district police officer, power supply network employee, etc. And everything costs you money."

54-year-old female respondent from Vanadzor

Landmine victims, too, addressed these issues quite actively. Among 27 respondents who identified obstacles to PWD entrepreneurship 7 were landmine victims. 5 of them spoke about high taxes, strong competition, which places PWD entrepreneurs at a disadvantage, and about the lack of financial resources. 2 other landmine victims leveled harsher and broader criticism at State bodies. The **male respondent** saw the main obstacle in:

"the attitude of State bodies, which contradicts the provisions of Article 3 of the Constitution that says that the human being, his or her dignity and the fundamental human rights and freedoms are an ultimate value. And that the State shall be limited by fundamental human and civil rights as a directly applicable right."

43-year-old male respondent from Yerevan

while the female respondent was even more vocal in her criticism of the State:

“We [PWD] cannot get any money from the State on loan because we do not have a cosigner. They think that we get only pensions and cannot repay a loan. But in many cases we behave more responsibly than the individuals who take out loans and then run away. They should not refuse us. They should give us loans. If we default on our obligations, then let them refuse. But they do not give us even a small chance so that we would get out of our current situation. No one, no bank makes a deal with us because we are condemned to the situation that we ended up in this country with our children. ... I do not know who is responsible but they make a very big mistake keeping people like us in this situation. The State will benefit too as the number of the poor will decrease. Why should we regard ourselves as poor? Why? It is a most unfortunate reality.”

43-year-old female respondent from Yerevan

In this passage she raises very important issues of prejudice and discrimination, entrenched stereotypes and opportunities denied, all on the grounds of disability.

Gender aspects in PWD entrepreneurship

This question was given to all 50 interviewed PWD. Their answers are presented in the table below.

Respondents	Do you want to learn any new trade/profession?		Total
	Yes	No	
Men	13	13	26
Women	6	18	24
Total	19	31	50

As the data indicate, almost every fifth respondent could not answer the question. Half of the respondents were of the opinion that gender has no role at all. The only entrepreneur in the sample shared this view. Only 6 respondents believed that female entrepreneurs faced more obstacles, while 10 respondents thought it was male entrepreneurs who faced more obstacles.

It is noteworthy, as indicated by the data in the Table below, that those respondents, who think that gender matters in this case, tend to believe that PWD entrepreneurs of their gender face more obstacles than PWD of the other gender. This tendency is more pronounced in case of male respondents.

Respondents	Do you want to learn any new trade/profession?		Total
	Yes	No	
Men	13	13	26
Women	6	18	24
Total	19	31	50

Even though the respondents were not asked why they thought so, two of them (a man and a woman, both from Gyumri and both have higher education) offered an explanation. Thus, a male respondent believes that male PWD entrepreneurs face more obstacles “because there are more entrepreneurs among them and they are more active than women.” (59-year-old male respondent from Gyumri). On the other hand, a female respondent is of the opinion that female PWD entrepreneurs face more obstacles because “as women, they do not inspire particular confidence as counterparts in business.” (61-year-old female respondent from Gyumri).

Thus, only one third of the respondents thought that gender of PWD entrepreneurs has an impact in terms of obstacles that they encounter. Most of those respondents were of the opinion that PWD entrepreneurs of their gender face more obstacles than entrepreneurs of the other gender.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The survey conducted in the capital city of Yerevan and in four regions of Armenia was instrumental in identifying a wide range of perceptions and perspectives of 3 key stakeholder groups (PWD, employers and EC representatives) on PWD employment-related issues, which are presented in this Report.

As in other countries the world over²², most Armenian PWD want to be active and productive citizens and to be accepted and treated as equals by the society at large, though in reality they are less economically active than people without disabilities and in all likelihood most of them live below the poverty line²³. While they need and expect more social and medical support from both governmental and non-governmental entities, they still would like to improve their socioeconomic situation primarily through their own efforts. Therefore, their focus is on employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Recent changes in the economic context has brought about the deterioration of labor market opportunities for PWD in Armenia, thereby increasing the disability gap in unemployment as in many countries, even developed ones²⁴. While the government policies could improve the situation, nevertheless, the survey data indicate that the respondents do not see those as providing sufficient work incentives to PWD. In addition, very few interviewed PWD and employers were aware of the programs implemented by SESA to promote, support and facilitate PWD employment.

The survey findings indicate that not all employers work closely with Employment Centers (EC) but when they do their “partner relations” are assessed as satisfactory or even good. At the same time, according to the surveyed PWD the role of ECs in terms of PWD job placement is modest at best because of limited powers, current economic climate and situation on the labor market, prevalent ideas and stereotypes held by employers and public at large, to mention just a few.

The survey findings also tend to indicate that ideas of socially responsible business and of the importance of projecting a positive image with general public are gradually taking hold.

Detailed conclusions on PWD employment issues are presented below:

PWD EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

- PWD want to see a more PWD-friendly stance of most governmental and non-governmental entities. They expect that the National Assembly and the Government will provide economic incentives to and expand economic opportunities for PWD. Top priority is job creation. PWD were forthright in urging all those entities to engage in job

²² See: World report on disability. Geneva: WHO and WB, 2011, p. 235.

²³ The minimum consumer basket in Armenia at the end of 2012 was 52,000 AMD (Հայաստանի Հանրապետության սոցիալ-տնտեսական վիճակը 2012 թվականի հունվար-դեկտեմբերին. Երևան, ԱԳՕ, 2013, էջ 254 – Socioeconomic situation of the Republic of Armenia in January-December 2012. Yerevan: NSS, 2013, p. 254, in Armenian). Three-fifth of the PWD in the sample had the average monthly household income of 25,000-80,000 AMD, one-fifth had 80,000-120,000 AMD and only one fifth had more than 120,000 AMD.

²⁴ See: Sickness, disability, and work: breaking the barriers. A synthesis of findings across OECD countries. Paris: OECD, 2010, p. 68.

creation regardless of whether an entity has an adequate capacity and a mission to do that.

- PWD need more effective measures that would improve workplace conditions and ensure continuance of employment and career advancement. As evidenced by the survey data, quota is seen as an effective instrument for PWD to obtain and maintain employment. In employers' and EC representatives' view, too, the quota system (alongside other affirmative action measures) for PWD is needed so as to improve drastically the PWD employment chances and opportunities.
- Landmine victims, a specific group among PWD, particularly stressed the issues of workplace adjustment and effective protection of PWD labor rights.
- Since effective institutional and legal mechanisms for ensuring PWD job security are still few, if any, the role of the culture of acceptance and equality acquires additional significance to withstand entrenched stereotypes and discriminatory public perceptions.
- Much emphasis is placed by PWD on the necessity for supported and sheltered employment through consistent policies which will, *inter alia*, make sure that enterprises for PWD are viable and self-sustainable and which provide strong incentives to employers to employ PWD.
- On the other hand, landmine victims were more eager to engage in economic activities, particularly to start a business, than other PWD in the survey sample. Also, the proportion of those who would like to learn a new trade is significantly higher among the landmine victims than the average in the entire group of interviewed PWD.
- There is a growing realization on the part of PWD that good education is indeed a key to employment, especially in case of technical and vocational education that is geared to local labor market needs.
- At the same time, only one-third of PWD respondents would like to learn a new trade/profession, with gender differences clearly manifested in this case, as the percentage of such individuals is twice as low among women as among men. Landmine victims, too have a mostly unmet need of special programs of vocational training and retraining and highlighted the lack of adequate education and skills as a barrier to PWD employment.

BARRIERS TO PWD EMPLOYMENT

The survey findings identified prevalence of certain **attitudinal** and **environmental** and to some extent **institutional**²⁵ **barriers** faced by PWD in the employment sphere:

- Employers' and co-workers' attitudes towards PWD as well as lack of knowledge about accommodation requirements and programs remain an issue for workplace integration.
- Employers and EC representatives concur that employers' perception of PWD as a liability and not an asset constitute a serious barrier to PWD employment.
- According to PWD respondents, alongside employers' unwillingness to hire PWD, the health problems and lack of jobs constitute the most significant barriers to PWD employment. On the other side, the absence of suitable jobs in the community, favoritism, age and a general lack of jobs are "demotivating" factors (i.e. factors that explain why PWD do not look for employment.)

²⁵ While in Armenia there are no laws discriminating against PWD, the *de facto* policies and practices of some employers, as evidenced by the survey findings, exclude PWD from workforce. This exclusion may take the form of direct, indirect or hidden discrimination. Respondents spoke time and again about employers' unwillingness to hire PWD (which is, at the least, hidden discrimination).

- Those factors coupled with the lack of employment opportunities and of supportive governmental policies outweigh other barriers and factors. That is the reason why very few respondents mentioned *lack of accessible transportation*, problems with *physical accessibility* of buildings and streets (lack of wheelchair ramps, elevators, curb ramps, audible traffic signals etc.), and *lack of accommodation* in the work place.
- PWD are aware that entrepreneurship is an alternative to scarce jobs and, thus, is an option to engage in economic activities, when opportunities for gainful employment and well-paying are limited. Half of the PWD respondents in the sample would start a small business, if given a soft loan. The other half would not, the main reasons being the *lack of enabling economic environment* (leading to fierce competition and failure of many business ventures) and of supportive legal framework and *fear* of banks.
- While speaking about the factors that constrain the development of entrepreneurship, landmine victims underlined unfair treatment, failure to provide equal competition and the bias and unfairness of the judicial system as the most prominent ones. In other words, they not only pointed at the lack of enabling economic environment and of supportive legal framework like other PWD but also decried the prevalent policies and practices that deny equality of opportunity.
- Other demotivating factors for PWD entrepreneurs are taxes (high and numerous), exorbitant rent, lack of available space, corruption, unfair competition and problems with the sale of produced goods, and lack of financial resources, especially for an initial investment.
- PWD also perceive State policies and practices as constituting a formidable obstacle to their entrepreneurship as those create an “oppressive environment.” In their view, the Government does little to stop corruption and other unhealthy practices of the officials who abuse their power.

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As regards measures that can be instrumental in removing barriers to PWD employment, PWD saw guaranteed provision of jobs and legislative changes as the most effective measures, followed by support given by NGOs or other organizations, PWD awareness-raising and special State programs for securing jobs for PWD. While sharing this view on job creation and provision, employers and EC representatives take a more nuanced position pointing out that coercion is not the best policy and that financial incentives are a much better and effective measure to that end.

GENDER ASPECT OF PWD EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

The survey findings clearly indicated that gender differences and gaps are played out also in the disability sphere, primarily in relation to PWD employment issues. They also tend to support the widely held view that despite the ratification of the UN convention on PWD rights and the adoption of the RoA Gender Policy Concept Paper the consistent and targeted Government policies in this area are still lacking. Efforts to integrate WWD into the labor market are not sufficient yet. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that WWD are susceptible to double discrimination, on the one hand as females and on the other hand as PWD.

While the below conclusions do not encompass the entire scope of ramifications of the existing gender-related practices and realities in the employment sector, they are still quite telling:

- The survey data indicate that in Armenia, as in other countries, women with disabilities (WWD) are less likely to be employed than men.
- Like non-PWD women, the WWD are to a greater extent involved in reproductive economy.
- The survey findings tend to support the UN statistics that more WWDs live at or below the poverty level than men with disabilities²⁶.
- Less than one third of PWD and virtually none of the surveyed employers and EC representatives believe that there is gender-based discrimination in PWD hiring and job retention.
- Female respondents indicated that they experience more social exclusion and marginalization in employment and in economic life than men.
- In male PWD's estimation, health problems, lack of jobs and employers' unwillingness to hire PWD constitute the most significant barriers to PWD employment. However, the proportion of female PWD respondents who identified those problems as barriers to PWD employment is dramatically lower than that of male PWD.
- Male PWD are significantly more inclined to start their own business than women. Their preferences lie in the field of production, while female PWD clearly preferred services and small retail trade.
- Finally, lack of awareness on PWD rights and opportunities, as well as scarcity of information on state programs to support WWD employment and entrepreneurship are among the barriers that limit participation in and integration of WWD into the labor market and public life.

²⁶ Human Development Report Armenia, Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development, UNDP, 2009.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The individual interview-based data generated by the study can be used by principal decision-makers to make a policy formulation and implementation process more effective thereby contributing to the translation of the CRPD commitments into action.

The recommendations made are in line with the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and international commitments made by the RoA Government, as well as with the priorities set forth in relevant national documents.

The below recommendations are grouped according to the three major spheres, viz. the legislative, economic, education and awareness raising spheres.

Legislative sphere / enabling environment

- Ensure that national legislation and policy framework on PWD issues completely embraces the universally accepted CRPD principles such as *non-discrimination, equal treatment and equal opportunity*, the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted, gender equality, and full and effective *participation and inclusion in society*. Apply and enforce the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of disability more vigorously and consistently, focusing, *inter alia*, on eliminating the remaining attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers to PWD employment;
- Create a *favorable policy environment* for promoting PWD employment through joint and coordinated efforts of all major stakeholders aimed to firmly establish this issue as a priority and to rally public support;
- Design an effective *policy framework* in line with the soon-to-be-adopted *Law on Protection of the Rights of People with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion* in consultation and cooperation of all stakeholders;
- Ensure that disability aspects are included in all general policy making and national planning.
- Ensure PWD participation in the decision-making process at all levels through their civil society organizations.
- Emphasize the importance for Government entities to set an example by employing more PWD, including through affirmative action programs (e.g. hold a separate contest for civil service positions for PWD; Include “equal opportunity employer” in the websites of government offices: examine the government Web page, especially its homepage and its human resources pages (<http://gov.am/am/vacancies/>), to ensure that content includes emphasizing the state’s efforts and interest in hiring workers with disabilities for state employment, etc);
- Ensure that commitment to the *social, rights-based model of disability* is more consistently reflected in legislation, policies, programming and practices with a view to creating an enabling and inclusive social, cultural and physical environment for PWD
- Integrate a gender equality dimension into all PWD employment -related legislation, policies and programs. Evaluate the design, implementation, and impact of PWD related programs and projects from a gender perspective;
- Assign a bigger role to social support schemes and programs in governmental policies and ensure effective social security mechanisms for better protection to PWD;
- Chart, implement, monitor and evaluate new comprehensive programs aimed to create and/or support an enabling environment for PWD employment, e.g. making SESA programs more flexible and custom-oriented;

- Establish preferential terms in the form of financial discounts for airings of social ads (Public Service Announcements) on disability employment on public television and Radio.
- Introduce and enforce stricter construction standards, rules and norms that would mandate physical accessibility of buildings to PWD and predicate issuance of any building permit on compliance with them;
- Factor transportation costs into all policies, projects and other initiatives aimed to promote PWD employment because even when PWD are gainfully employed, their income is usually modest and they can hardly afford transportation costs, if at all.
- Ensure that existing laws, standards, norms and regulations are properly enforced and complied with.

Economic

- Examine the best practices and lessons learned worldwide regarding PWD employment issues with a view to making use of them (e.g. the experience of “social enterprises”)
- Restore the earlier discontinued practices of establishing and supporting sheltered employment for those PWD who have a slim or no chance of getting a job through open employment arrangements (e.g. persons with visual or hearing impairments)
- Further promote and enhance effectiveness of supported employment for PWD, including various programs facilitating PWD employment, such as reserved employment schemes, partial compensation of PWD salaries, tax exemptions, vocational education, etc.
- Further promote and enhance effectiveness of supported employment for WWD;
- Expand the scope and number of *workplace accommodation* programs and other *affirmative action* programs for PWD;
- Ensure that the social welfare system does not “penalize” employed PWD by denying them pensions and other benefits, since an enabling environment also entails the removal of disincentives for PWD to engage in gainful work (except substantial gainful activity);
- Decrease taxes for working PWD;
- Draw up and implement more and better-focused targeted programs of support to entrepreneurship and self-employment (including logistical assistance and assistance with permits and licenses), which are tailored to specific and individual needs of PWD
 - Reduce taxes for self-employed and entrepreneur PWD
 - Facilitate provision of soft loans to self-employed and entrepreneur PWD
- Design special programs to support WWD self-employment and entrepreneurship;
- Sensitize SMEA staff on modern practices of PWD integration into the labor market, so as to eliminate constraints for PWD employment opportunities resulting from a narrowly defined range of occupations in the *Recommendations on PWD Rehabilitation and Employment*;
- Ensure accessibility to Employment Centers and move them to ground floors of the buildings, including newly designed *Integrated Social Services Centers* or, at least, ensure that buildings with EC offices have ramps and properly operating elevators;
- Start gradual transition to PWD needs-adjusted, accessible public transportation to expand PWD employment opportunities;

- Encourage employers (via specially designed PWD transportation support schemes and programs) to provide transportation to their PWD employees (through governmental support to purchasing specially equipped and designed vehicles, partially defraying fuel and maintenance costs, etc.);
- Encourage privately owned transportation companies (via financial and other incentives) to introduce PWD-accessible transportation.

Education and awareness raising

- Further promote provision of relevant and marketable skills and knowledge, and place greater focus in terms of funding and encouragement on targeted programs of vocational and professional education and on-the-job training (with a significant skills-training component) for PWD that would enhance their competitiveness in the open labor market and thus increase opportunities for their gainful employment
- Examine, experiment with, test and assess innovative TVET approaches and schemes for PWD used in other countries, especially through pilot projects (e.g. a promising “place and train” model could supplement the traditional “train and place” model of vocational skills development);
- Highlight the importance of a gender sensitive approach in the operation of SESA and SMEA, particularly with a view to eliminating the double discrimination of WWD;
- Sensitize employers, including through policies aimed to remove barriers that persist in the form of stereotypes, prejudice and misinformation;
- Make consistent efforts to combat stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes on the part of (potential) employers, colleagues and public at large, especially by getting mass media and churches on board;
- Improve the situation with measures aimed at PWD awareness-raising of the privileges and opportunities granted to them by the Armenian legislation;
- Design the government’s Web page to be more universally accessible, including making the state’s Web-based employment application processes more accessible to people with all types of disabilities, adopting Web accessibility standards, and providing for special testing arrangements for people with disabilities;
- Make any disseminated information accessible in alternative formats – Braille, audio books, large print, etc.;
- Make SESA official website accessible for users with vision impairments;
- Strengthen the institutional capacity of NGOs (especially DPOs) in advocacy and service provision (including vocational training) to PWD;
- Identify local success stories and disseminate positive experience and effective practices.

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Finally, a task force with a broad mandate should be set up to ensure closer cooperation between the government agencies, business sector, and civil society organizations with a view to expediting the implementation of the above recommendations aimed at the solution of the problems faced by PWD in employment sphere.