

LLP-ERASMUS
Intensive Programme

**Internet advanced promotional tools application for increasing awareness
of social exclusions movement**

Social exclusion of handicap people In Romania

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Introduction

The notion of social exclusion of handicap people describes a worldwide phenomenon and Romania is one of the countries that struggle with a significant number of disabled people. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, handicap refers to 1) the difficulties encountered while deploying a certain activity and 2) a person's sensory, physical, mental impairment or of any other kind (<http://dexonline.ro/definitie/handicap>).

Therefore, people with disabilities are confronted with barriers and constraints of different nature that subjugate their chance to a normal life. The lack of accessibility (the proper assistive devices that help disabled people participate in habitual actions such as going to school or to work) defines the boundaries of handicap as a social problem (<http://asociatia-ihitis.ro/2008/06/10/diferenta-dintre-handicap-si-dizabilitate/>). The exclusion of disabled people relies, among others, on people's lack of interest or refusal of altering the environment in order to make it suitable for people with disabilities. It is important to underline the slight difference between handicap and disability. The notion of handicap defines the impossibility of people with disabilities to lead a more autonomous life. For instance, a person with disabilities wearing prosthetic legs is able to find a suitable job, go to work and earn an income. Chances are reduced drastically for the same person who does not have access to prosthetic legs. Therefore, the disability induces the handicap.

It is more than obvious that people look at disabled people with pity, all the more so if the disability is visible. It is not something to condemn, because pity represents a human emotion. The problem is the lack of implication, the passivity, the coldness with which they treat disabled people in need. Despite the shared wish to help, most people are blocked by a certain carelessness (probably involuntarily guided by the feeling of security), which emphasizes the overview problem as being the social exclusion of disabled people and not the handicap itself.

Romania, a country that once belonged to the Eastern Block, or Communist Block, during the period between 1947 and 1989, is continually changing, by enlarging its vision about life, by trying to erase all sort of exclusion related to people.

During the past, during Communist Romania, unfortunately, the communist society did not have the least interest in including in it people with disabilities. Nonetheless, following this period, people gradually started to change, they started to become aware of the difficulties encountered by those with disabilities. They also took into account the fact that the

social exclusion of these people would have meant that we are not all equal in rights and freedoms as contrary to the principles underlying any democracy.

Romania, an official member of the European Union since 2007, has adopted and implemented EU laws, including those for social inclusion. The EU aim is to ensure equality by trying to take into account the special needs of those who are less advantaged. This is also what our country is trying to do as well.

Although Romania is still affected by its past, Romanian governments and non-governmental institutions have done and are doing their best to fight against social exclusion by promoting inclusion and participation of people with disabilities. Our country's objective is to build an inclusive society, where everyone has access to education, employment and health care. Despite this, in order to create adequate environments for people with disabilities funds are necessary.

In order to prevent the social exclusion of disabled people, one must also take into account the attitudes of those who are more advantaged than those who are not. Negative behaviors, as a result of education lead to discrimination. People are bullied and mistreated because of their impairments or limitations. To conclude, there are a lot of steps to be taken in terms of infrastructure, and what seems to be very important as well is the fact that mentalities also need to be changed.

“My first day at high school, a teacher asked me what was I doing in that class, telling me that I didn't belong there. It affected me and I cried. I was expecting such an unfriendly welcome from my colleagues, not from my teacher. I told her she shouldn't judge people by their looks and I showed her that I can study just the same way as others can. I graduated high school with distinction, I was an example for my colleagues, and the teacher in question admitted her mistake towards me.”

Elena

A brief history of disability from ancient times until today can emphasize the fact that beauty and the idea of a perfect body has always influenced social life and has been considered either an advantage or a disadvantage in the process of adapting to the requirements of the society. This is how the following belief appeared: “those who are beautiful are <<good>> and those who bear deformities or disabilities are <<bad>>. After centuries of oppression, stigmatization, fight against prejudices and discrimination, only towards the end of the 19th century did the disabled people start to fight for their rights. (V.

Stamatin, 2010)

In our country things worked quite similarly. Romania has become a member of the European Union only on January 1st 2007 and has been practically forced to adopt the European set of regulations regarding the rights of disabled people and the directions of development of the services for these people. Still, this comes after a long period of communism, a period during which the system of social welfare was completely absent and now Romanian society faces difficulties in successfully putting these measures into practice. It is a struggle, and specialized organizations must also face the faulty system and the indoctrinated ideas of a post-communist society, in order to achieve the same rights for people with disabilities.

According to the National Authority for Disabled people, via the General Directions of Social Assistance and Child Protection, “in Romania, at regional, local and Bucharest level on December 31st 2008, there were 631,199 disabled people. Among these, 97.3% (613,199 people) are in their family care or live independently, while the rest of 2.7% (17,275 people) live within residences of social welfare for people with disabilities, coordinated by the National Authority for Disabled people.”

However, there are several categories of disabled people which are ignored by the statistics such as those who are not aware of their legal rights, or people who refuse the awarding of a certificate for disability. People beyond retirement age, who suffered an accident or who live on the street are also out of the scope of the statistics.

Although a strong set of regulations and laws did not exist until 2007, the influence of the European Union motivated the Government to actively improve the legislation and the rights for disabled people.

1. Level and structure of handicap people exclusion

According to the National Authority for Disabled Persons in Romania, the latest statistics (updated on March 31st 2012) indicate a total number of 689,156 disabled persons, institutionalized and not institutionalized children and adults. It is important to mention that this number represents only those who have declared their handicap and receive social and financial aid from the state. The number of undeclared disabled persons is unknown.

Disabled persons face difficulties from a young age. It is important to analyze the level of exclusion of handicap people taking into consideration the fundamental stages in their life.

✓ Childhood and education

A flagrant issue regarding handicap children is represented by schooling. Many children, due to the degree of their handicap, cannot take part in public school. They have special needs which can be fulfilled only within the framework of a specialized institution that disposes of qualified personnel. In Romania, there are very few special schools for disabled children and those which function have a very bad reputation. The lack of specialized institutions that have the means to cope with the needs of disabled children reduces their chances dramatically from the very beginning. Research studies conducted by the Romanian television station Pro TV in 2009 revealed that handicap children are denied the right to public school. The reason stands in the principals' refusal to accept them, due to the extra obligations and responsibilities they must take. Thus, children are denied the right to study, although the law 446/2006 regarding the defense of the population clearly stipulates that parents are the only ones who decide in what school to enroll their children. (http://www.dreptonline.ro/legislatie/lege_pregatire_aparare_tara.php)

While principals break the law, parents have been fighting the system for years and children can only dream of education. What is interesting is the fact that many of the disabled children are extremely gifted and have traits of above-average intelligence. In Romania, society refuses to acknowledge this fact instead of giving children in need a helping hand.

Once integrated in the educational system, disabled children are often harassed by the other students. They are the target of bad jokes, pranks and bullying, irrespective of the nature or the degree of their handicap. When they are not harassed, they are ignored even when in need of help. Handicap children are often ignored at the playground. Not being able to protect themselves and to stand for their rights for sustained reasons worsens the already overwhelming feeling of being socially excluded.

✓ Workplace

According to the European Convention on Human Rights, every individual has the right to work as well as to fair working conditions:

'States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labor market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities'. (<http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>)

Despite all, in Romania, the labor market is still misfit when it comes to the disabled. According to the Romanian daily newspaper *'Evenimentul Zilei'*, only 11% of the disabled persons managed to find a workplace. This means that 0.86% percent of Romania's total active population is represented by handicap people. (<http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/locul-de-munca-le-pune-bete-n-roate-romanilor-cu-handicap-905190.html>)

Although raising consciousness on the issue of handicap is no longer a neglected subject, employers remain reluctant to hiring disabled persons. In Romania, the main problem is represented by the lack of accessibilities and the non-implication of most employers. Also, the lack of proper education reduces the chances for handicap people to find a suitable workplace. Therefore, social exclusion of handicap people on the labor market reaches a very high level. Despite the fact that Romania aligned to European standards regarding the legislation for disabled people, employers hardly observe it. The director of the *Motivation* Organization in Romania, Gabriela Comănescu, declared in an interview for the newspaper *Evenimentul Zilei* that the Romanian labor market is too competitive and not enough specialized for the disabled. The Program for the Integration of Disabled People into Employment within the *Motivation* Organization has made an important distinction among employers in Romania. In this respect, Gabriela Comănescu states that handicap people in Romania have two options with regards to employment: *'We either find them jobs within multinational companies, which have a cultural organization open for the disabled (but for these jobs we need people with studies and they are not very numerous), or we can offer them under-qualified and consequently, poorly paid positions'* (<http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/locul-de-munca-le-pune-bete-n-roate-romanilor-cu-handicap-905190.html>). Thus, employers avoid hiring handicap people mainly because of the additional responsibilities they must engage and the mistrust in the quality of the work performed by handicap people.

The structure of handicap people exclusion varies in terms of certain specific factors. In this respect, it is important to mention that exclusion occurs at any level, affecting children and adults likewise.

✓ *Exclusion related to age*

Handicap children and young persons are exposed to exclusion to a greater extent than adults. Despite the fact that the law provides a wider range of stipulations regarding the protection of handicap children, they are unable to defend themselves. Even if the young disabled enjoy access to information and are aware of their rights, they face the phenomenon of exclusion at a very high level. Their disabilities represent a physical and psychological barrier that burdens their active participation within the society. Facing social exclusion at a young age can have a negative impact on the development of handicap children, reducing their chances of employment.

Disabled adults are exposed to exclusion to a greater extent on the labor market. They are denied the right to work or they are given poorly paid jobs. Some of them are parents and the need of being employed is crucial.

✓ *Exclusion related to place of living*

The exclusion of handicap people occurs at a higher level in the rural as opposed to the urban areas. The lack of accessibilities in the rural environment is far more conspicuous than in the urban one. A plausible explanation could be the low general living standard in the rural areas. Inversely, the urban area offers more opportunities for the disabled from the point of view of accessibility as well as employment.

Although the level of handicap people exclusion in Romania remains rather high, there have been major changes in the past years, mostly with the help of the European Union. The European legislation regarding the protection and rights of the disabled was applied in Romania rather fast. The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Disabled is one of the most important pieces of legislation for the Romanian associations and organizations that fight against social exclusion of handicap people. Some of the provisions of the Convention were applied without delay: the issue of access of disabled people was radically improved.

Some other provisions, however, are still to come into force in the next years. In this respect, numerous campaigns on the consciousness of the issue of handicap have been organized in the past years in Romania within the framework of national and multinational companies, schools and associations.

Romania's blazing issue is represented by mentality. In this respect, voluntary and obvious discrimination comes from persons who have the legal authority and obligation to help the disabled. As presented above, school principals and employers refuse to ensure the nexus between the law and the persons in need. A first step in changing Romanians' individualist mentality focuses on awareness campaigns. The sustained implication of the media improves the process of awareness of the society in regards to the issue of handicap people. Strategies for the inclusion on handicap people in the society focus on the principle of equality and access to education and work. Avoidance of labeling the disabled as inferior persons is extremely important, as it shows the change in mentality that is needed in Romania.

2. Causes and consequences of handicap people exclusion

“The only disability in life is a bad attitude.” - Scott Hamilton

Handicap people are excluded from society because they are *different*. While other people make the conscious choice to be different from others, the disabled do not. Disability is not a matter of choice. The standard of a “normal life” is not having a disability, but handicap does not let people many options. Therefore, the mission of the disabled is to make their own standard of a normal life, adapted to their needs. But how could they do this if the society does not give them a helping hand?

One of the main causes for the exclusion of handicap people in Romania is people’s **mentality**. Romania’s transition process is far from being over. In the dawn of democracy, Romania still struggles to overcome the scars of communism in many areas. According to Dan Ungureanu, a contemporary Romanian writer, Romania stagnated during the half century of the communist period; there was no evolution whatsoever in what concerns the psychological development. (*‘Zidul de aer’*, 2008). The author explains that Romanians do not judge according to a series of given general principles, but on the basis of given circumstances. Hence, social exclusion of handicap people in Romania relies on specific patterns of thinking, on wrong perceptions and on stereotyping. The explanation might be found in Dan Ungureanu’s conclusions on Romanians’ mentality: among others, he evokes individualism and diffuse personalism, lack of fair-play and cultural elitism as main detrimental issues.

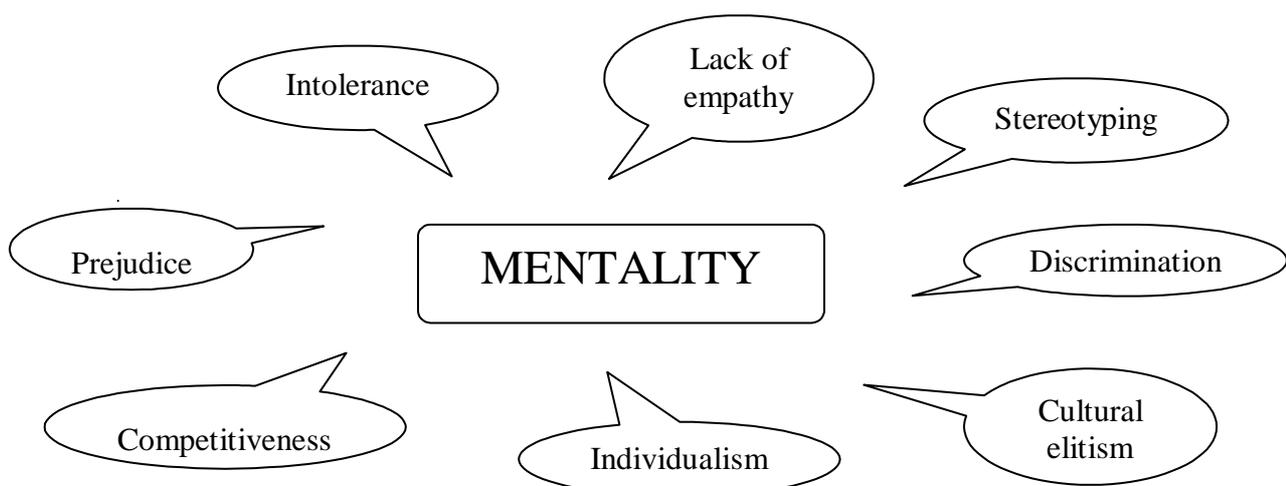


Figure 1 Negative consequences of a wrong mentality

Ungureanu explains that *“the Romanian society is elitist and elitist societies only imitate the structure of democratic societies. This has destroyed the effort of a few foreign foundations to develop the civic spirit in Romania.”* (Ungureanu, 2008:45).

As a direct consequence of an altered mentality, **prejudices** influence our behavior within the society. In his book called “Emotional Intelligence”, Daniel Goleman describes prejudice as “a sort of emotional data acquired at a very young age, which makes [biased] reactions very difficult to eradicate entirely, even in the case of adults who realize they are wrong when they think in a biased way” (Goleman, 2008:207). The exclusion of handicap people in Romania occurs for the same reason: people are influenced by what they have learned within their family, during childhood. They act according to different patterns of thinking. These patterns acquired in childhood rely, among others, on the following factors: level of education, level of IQ and of EQ (emotional intelligence), as well as on the political and economic situation of a particular country.

In Romania, the exclusion of handicap people happens also because of people’s **lack of empathy** and interpersonal intelligence. Goleman defines interpersonal intelligence as “the ability to understand the others: what motivates them, how they work, how they can cooperate” (Goleman, 2008:68). But how could the disabled stand out and show how they work and cooperate if they are not given the chance?

Another important factor when explaining the exclusion of the disabled is empathy, which is “the skill of knowing how others feel” (Goleman, 2008:137). It is interesting to underline that people cannot understand how the disabled feel because they do not have the same condition. However, when put in the situation to imagine themselves in the posture of a disabled person, one gets thoughtful. This is the moment when people become considerate of the feelings of others and express tolerance, temporarily however.

The consequences of social exclusion of the handicap are damaging at a psychological level both for those who are excluded and for those who exclude. Social exclusion unveils an elitist society, where **individualism** gains more and more power. Disabled children are the most affected, especially those who have an inborn handicap. They have hopes for the better, they dream to have a job and a family, they crave for some independence. The society rejects their wishes by not offering them access to proper education. This has a major influence on disabled children: they become anti-social and depressed. Depression in children is a sign that society is not aware of the turns it takes. People have become egocentric, they refuse to understand the others. Therefore, egocentrism, individualism and competitiveness are only a

few of the factors that characterize the present situation in Romania regarding the social exclusion of the disabled. To a greater extent, this affects the overall welfare of the state. Perhaps the word is too rough, but people are desperate. This happens because the life standard is low, because they need to know themselves in a good state before the others. There is no balance in the Romanian society. While a disabled child hopes for a wheelchair, a politician hopes for a better car.

Consequences of social exclusion of the handicap do not only affect the individuals as humans, but the entire European community and the process of integration. "Towards a united Europe" was the slogan of the federalists' manifesto who wanted to create a united Europe.

A study carried out by the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC) shows that "there is some evidence that economic growth is positively related to equality. One explanation for this is that with more equality there is more investment in education, health and nutrition. There is also some evidence to show that policies designed to tackle social exclusion can lead to more equitable forms of growth as excluded groups gradually gain greater access to education, employment and business opportunities" (<http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/social-exclusion/the-impact-of-exclusion>). Therefore, one of the major negative effects the exclusion of handicap people has on Romania relates to the economic situation of the county. In the absence of equality, there will be less economic growth. Furthermore, in Romania, the vulnerable category of the disabled is also suffering from poverty. This means poorer levels of health and education for the country itself, especially when their poverty is combined with lack of social services.

In nature, sick or injured animals become prey for hungry predators. They are left behind by the others. This is an instinctual behavior that emphasizes the circle of life. As opposed to animals that act instinctually, humans have the capacity to think, they have the possibility of reasoning. Then, why are people in need left behind within the framework of a society? Perhaps the instinctual behavior overtakes cognition, emphasizing the need for survival.

3. Government role in preventing handicap people exclusion

The officially recognized disability policy in Romania is expressed in law. The emphasis – in descending scale – is on: rehabilitation, prevention, individual support, accessibility measures, anti-discrimination law.

The Government of Romania provides the right to social assistance, social benefits and facilities to people with disabilities according to the classification set out in the degree of disability certificate, extracted from the **Law 448/2006, regarding the protection and promotion of disabled people, republished in 2008.**

- This law secures the equal rights of persons with disabilities in fields such as: access to education and professional development, labor, health, and cultural life. According to Article 8, paragraphs 1-3, the National Authority for Disabled Persons, NADP, (*Autoritatea Nationala pentru Persoanele cu Handicap*) and other central or regional government authorities are charged with a positive duty to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. Article 92 of this law creates a Council, responsible for examining the problems faced by persons with disabilities (*Consiliul de analiza a problemelor persoanelor cu handicap*). This Council functions as an advisory body subordinated to the NADP.

There are laws and regulations requiring that public places, the outdoor environment, means of transportation and housing are made accessible. Accessibility in the build environment is observed by a national authority and local Governments. The following measures have been promoted by the Government in order to facilitate accessibility in the build environment: marking parking areas, installing lifts and accessible toilets, improving accessibility in housing, financial incentives for accessibility measures, installing special lighting for visually impaired, and provision of specially adapted motor vehicles. Special transport arrangements for persons with disabilities include: free urban and interurban transport on buses and trains and available for the following purposes: medical treatment, education, work and recreational purpose. According to the Government, the most difficult obstacles when planning to build accessible environments are attitudinal factors, lack of knowledge, research and information. There is no disability awareness component incorporated in the training of planners, architects and construction engineers. Sign language for deaf people is recognized as the main means of communication between deaf persons and others. There are Government measures for encouraging media and other forms of public information to make their services accessible. The following services are provided in order to

facilitate information and communication between persons with disabilities and other persons: literature in Braille/tape, sign language interpretation being available for any purpose, easy readers for persons with mental disabilities.

Rights of persons with disabilities in terms of health and recovery

- People with disabilities receive free care, including free medicines, both for self-treatment as well as during hospitalization in the health insurance system, under the agreed framework.

In order to provide assistance for the recovery / rehabilitation, persons with disabilities have the right to:

- Use free outpatient medical devices, according to and as provided in the Framework Agreement on the conditions for granting medical assistance in the health insurance system and its implementing rules;
- Free accommodation and food services for the attendant of a child or an adult with severe and profound disabilities in any medical unity, sanatorium or spa recommended by the specialist, provided by the Unique National Found of Health Insurance, according to the Framework Agreement on the conditions for granting medical assistance in the health insurance system;
- Free spa treatment, during the year, based on individual program of rehabilitation and social integration recommended by the family doctor or a specialist.

Rights of persons with disabilities in education:

- People with disabilities have free and equal access to all forms of education, according to the type, degree of disability and their educational needs. Persons with disabilities have continuous education and training throughout their entire life.

In the process of education, regardless of the disability, people have the right to:

- educational support services;
- Technical equipment adapted to the type and degree of their disability;
- Adaptation of classroom furniture;

- Textbooks and courses in accessible formats for students with visual impairments;
- The use of assistive equipment and software in exams of any type and level.

Rights of disabled persons in terms of property:

- In order to ensure access for persons with disabilities to obtain a home, public authorities are obliged to take measures to introduce a priority criterion to rent at lower levels houses belonging to the state or its local governments.

People with severe disabilities have the following rights:

- To be provided with a living room, in addition to minimum housing standards required by law, based on lease contracts for homes that belong to public or private domain of the state or its local governments;
- Setting the rate at the minimum rate required by law, based on lease agreements for residential areas for housing, owned by the state and its administrative-territorial units.

Rights of disabled persons in the field of culture, sport and tourism:

Adults with disabilities receive tickets to shows, museums, arts and sports events, as follows:

- Adults with severe and profound disabilities and the accompanying person are free of charge;
- Adults with medium or low disabilities benefit of the same conditions as for students.

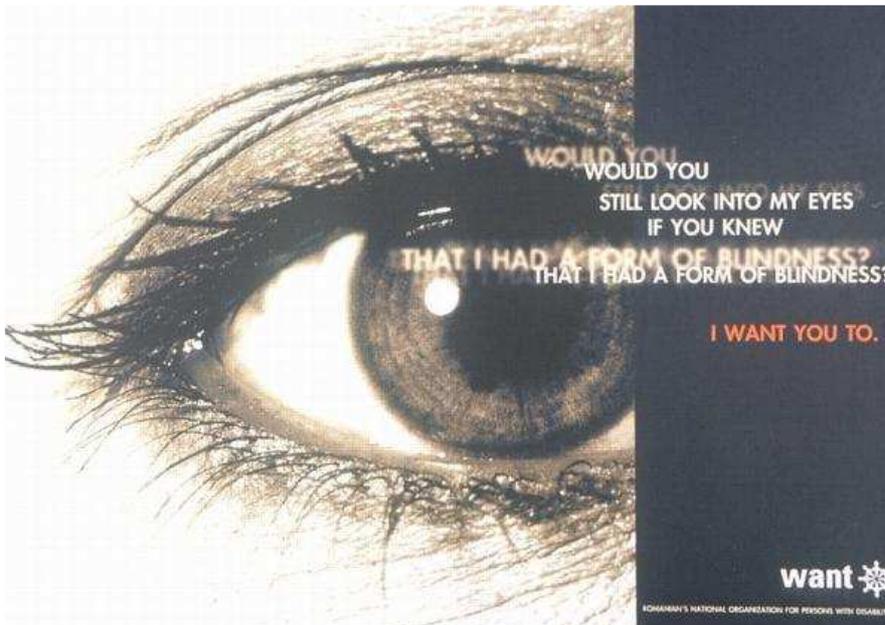
Rights of persons with disabilities in transport:

- People with severe and pronounced disabilities are free of charge on all lines in urban transport means transport by surface and underground.
- People with severe disabilities receive free interurban transportation choice, with any type of train (the train ticket cost limit for 2nd class) bus, or river transport vessels, for 12 round trips per year.

Romania has signed the United Nations Convention and the Optional Protocol. Important national laws, policies and strategies concerning disabled people include:

- Law no. 448/2006, Regarding the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Disabled Persons, Republication (last amended in June 2008). 269/207 provides detailed rules for implementation.

- Law no. 448/2006, Regarding the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Disabled Persons, Republication 1 OG no. 1 – January 3, 2008. Norms for accessibility in the built environment are set out in NP 051 2001
- The National Strategy for the Special Protection and Social Integration of Disabled People in Romania was approved in 2002, based on the principles of the 1993 UN Standard Rules, and addresses: rehabilitation; special education; equal opportunities; support services. The priority objectives were administrative and institutional reform.
- The Disability Manifesto in Romania (Report of Romanian National Council of Disability), 2003, Bucharest.



"THE EYE" Print

Ad for Disability Awareness by Graffiti BBDO. Romanian National Organization Of Disabled People Ads & Commercials Archive

4. Institutions and their actions

The organizations of physically handicapped persons and the organizations of mentally handicapped are represented in the national umbrella organization. The Government states that legal provisions exist mandating the representatives of persons with disabilities to participate in policy-making and to work with Governmental institutions. Organizations are always consulted when laws and regulations with a disability aspect are being prepared. Such Consultations take place at both the national, regional and local level.

The Government gives both financial and organizational/logistic support to organizations. Disabled persons do not at all participate in Governments, legislature, judiciary, political parties. They do, however, to a great extent participate in NGOs. The disabled persons' organizations in Romania have the role to: advocate rights and improved services, mobilize persons with disabilities, identify needs and priorities, participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of services and measures, contribute to public awareness, and provide services.

The key national bodies with responsibility for disability law and policy implementation include:

- **Autoritatea Nationala Pentru Persoane cu Handicap (ANPH)** is a governmental body with responsibilities for policies, national and regional strategies and intervention programs for all persons with disabilities. Also, they manage services, propose legislation and monitor NGOs.
- **State Secretary for Persons with Handicap (SSPH)**
- **National Agency for Child Protection and Adoption (ANPCA)**
- **Ministry of Health and Family (MHF)**
- **Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity (MMSS)**
- **Ministry of Education and Research (MEC).**

The national organization representing disabled people at the European level (European Disability Forum) is: **Organizatia Nationala a Persoanelor cu Handicap din Romania (ONPHR)**; it is the most important NGO involved in national programs for deinstitutionalization, equality of opportunity and social integration. The initiative to form a national council of disabled people (CNDR) occurred in 2004. Other significant national organizations of disabled people include:

- Romanian National Association for the Deaf
- Romanian Association of the Blind

Data on population indicate that:

According to the official data there were **613,924** persons with disabilities at **December 31, 2008** (much below the share of 7-12% in the total population calculated for EU Member States). Of these, **59,164 were children** and **554,760 were adults** (National Authority for Disabled Persons; ANPH Statistics; National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption). Organizations representing disabled people contest the figures, mainly because they refer to the number of disability certificates issued by each territorial commission. In **2006** disabled adults and children were **2.25%** of the population (488,054 persons, of whom 261,449 are women), slightly increasing during **2007** to **2.63%** (567,542 persons, of whom 308,812 women). The number of disabled adults in residential institutions has decreased, while the number of disabled adults in the care of the family or living on their own has increased. Data on employment indicate that: The number of **disabled persons employed** was recorded as **21,906 on 31 December 2007**, compared to 16,225 on 31 December 2006.

Of these, 2,431 were people with severe disabilities and 16,707 people with significant disabilities. (National Strategic National Report Regarding Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010)

The difficulties of integration for disabled persons are extremely varied and mainly relate to community and employment, accessibility and attitudes.

People with disabilities face a higher risk of being excluded from society. To what extent the risk materializes depends on a number of factors. One of them is where a person with a disability lives. According to data from Europe and CIS, if he or she happens to live in rural area, the risk of social exclusion is most severe. The risk falls by almost half in urban centers, and further in capital cities.

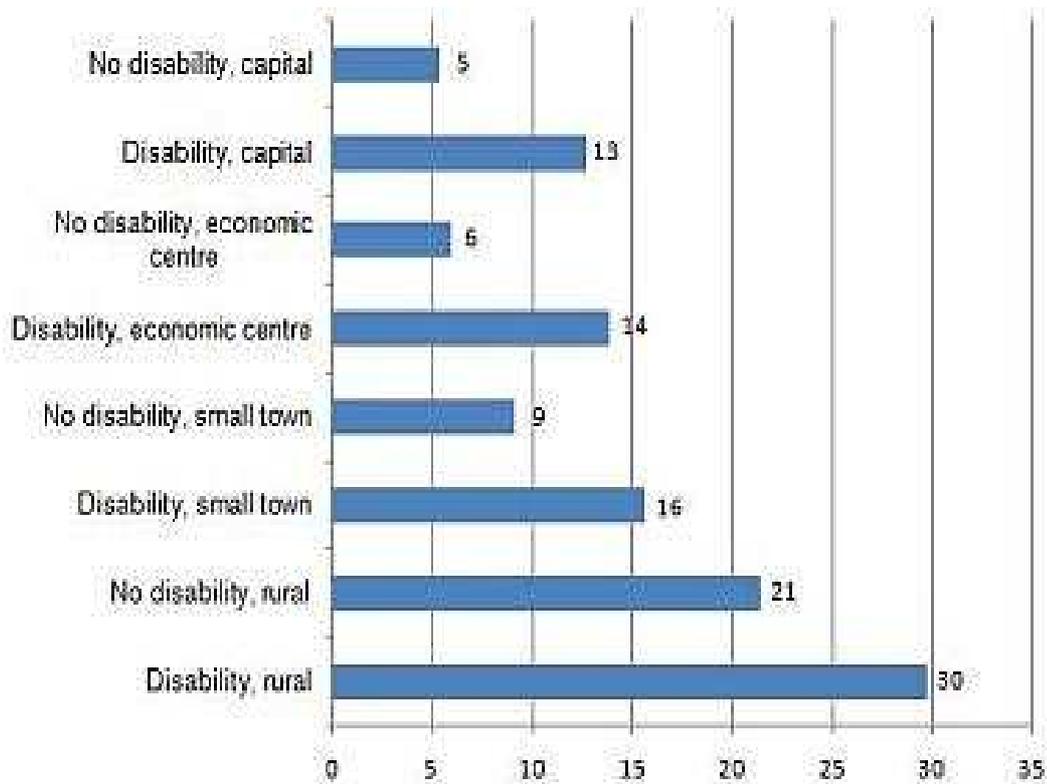


Figure 2. Social exclusion index value based on where people live with and without disabilities

Attitudes play a major role in determining whether people with disabilities experience social exclusion. Social exclusion risks for a person with disabilities doubles when a significant portion of the population (at least one third) opposes inclusive measures.

**This information was taken from the UNDP Regional Human Development Report: Beyond Transition, Towards Inclusive Societies, 2011, which is being launched at Oxford University on Monday, 20 June, 2011.*

Employers often prefer to pay the penalties set forth by the law rather than to employ disabled persons.

In 2006, Romanians were comparatively less in favor of measures being adopted to provide equal opportunities employment of disabled people (79%, which is 8 points below the European average (Eurobarometer, 2007))

5. Other activities against handicap people exclusion

As we have previously seen, legislation and regulations are developed by Romania's government and governmental institutions as to include and integrate people with disabilities in the society. Their objective is to adapt any environment – physical, informational and communicational environment – to disabled persons by offering equal chances and treatment as to all the other members of society.

In Romania, there are as well several non-governmental institutions and federations that take special measures in order to avoid social exclusion of disabled people. They represent the interests of people with disabilities, promoting right to education, facilitating access into the labor market. They offer counseling and training to disabled people, one of their most important objective being the one to improve the self-confidence and self-esteem of people who face disadvantages in their daily lives. The main idea is that, through support and understanding, one can gain or regain control over his/her life.

For instance, the non-governmental foundation *Motivation* offers support for people with disabilities, providing adaptive equipment for different types of motor disabilities, medical rehabilitation and independent life skills. It also promotes opportunities for work and employment considering that through social and professional integration, one of the most dramatic effects of disability is avoided, that is, the individual's isolation.¹

The *Estuar Foundation* is a national organization which offers social alternatives to people with intellectual impairments and mental health conditions in order to integrate them in the Romanian society. This organization fights against discrimination and marginalization. Its main objective is to encourage disabled persons to take risks in living a normal life.²

The Association *Acces pentru toți*³ represents the materialization of values and principles that any inclusive society should share. It provides educational programs and services to promote personal and professional development for persons facing impairments. These activities take place in a creative environment where disabled people face no barriers in discovering and improving their abilities. The principal programs within this association include:

- Developing skills to get a job;
- Personal development;

¹ <http://www.motivation.ro/ro/programe-proiecte>

² <http://www.estuar.org>

³ *Access for All*

- Reasonable adjustment;
- Advocacy and self-advocacy;
- Foreign languages;
- IT - information technology.⁴

The regional network *PACES (Promovarea și Aplicarea Conceptelor Economiei Sociale*⁵) is a project that facilitates access of disabled people to employment. An inclusive and cohesive society is promoted while education has an active role in avoiding discrimination. Disabled persons are helped to develop skills and competences according to their impediments. Psychological counseling is offered as well. Thus, persons with disabilities take part in courses and professional trainings in order to increase their possibilities to get into the labour market.⁶

Another special action against disabled people exclusion takes the form of a *gala*. Organized under the sponsorship of the European Commission, *Gala persoanelor cu dizabilități*⁷ is an important event whose mission is to reinvent society, to open its gates to all disabled people. Their objective is to make simple things accessible to all. Disabled people should be offered the possibility to show how strong, capable, creative and determined they are to overtake the limits set by those around them. In order to do so, they need our active support and they need to be publicly recognized. This event's important aim is to show all the benefits society would have as a result of the inclusion of people with impairments. As Mircea Toma, co-organizer of *Gala persoanelor cu dizabilități* says: "Let's eliminate the particle *dis* from disability".⁸

On 1st October 2012, "Grigore Antipa" National Museum of Natural History started the project called *Muzeul Tuturor*⁹. The aim of this project is to facilitate access to information and cultural events for people with disabilities. The museum was equipped with adapted devices as to form a specific environment where disabled people can easily have access to information:

- installment of 20 bass-reliefs with Braille explanations;
- expositions equipped with audio explanations ; the visitors are also guided by a tour guide with visual impairments;

⁴ <http://www.ngoaccess.ro/index.html>

⁵ *Promotion and Application of the Social Economy Concepts*

⁶ <http://www.paces.ro/ro/despre-proiect/prezentare-proiect>

⁷ Disabled People Gala

⁸ <http://www.incluziune.org/>

⁹ Everyone's Museum

- expositions for persons with hearing impairments;
- workshops for persons with motor disabilities;
- improvements to building design in order to ensure the safety and comfort for disabled people.¹⁰

As presented above, institutions and foundations are offering their support to disabled people by promoting inclusion and participation, improving accessibility, increasing confidence and self-esteem, creating equal opportunities. These are special measures whose aim is to exclude discrimination based on impairments of an individual.



However, not only official bodies fight against social exclusion of disabled people. There are also persons facing impairments who despite their condition are living their life to the fullest.

Ciprian Anton lost the capacity to walk following an accident at work. This didn't stop him continue doing what he most loved before the accident, that is lawn tennis. According to Ciprian "sport means life, hope and socializing for all of us". Thus, in 2011 he established the first national team consisting of people with motor disabilities. His greatest wish is to promote lawn tennis in a wheelchair and to show everyone the values of disabled people. As he says, "We need you to know us better".¹¹

Mihai Neșu, former Romanian football player, after a crash with one of his colleagues during training, was left without any feeling from his neck down. From this experience, he learned that one needs the help of those around him/her to do things like eating or dressing. That is why, a while after the accident, Mihai started the *Mihai Neșu Foundation* which offers help for children with disabilities. Over 100 children with motor impairments from Bihor county receive appropriate treatment to overcome their condition. Mihai wishes to help everyone in his situation, considering that through his actions, he will also recover in an easier

way.¹²

¹⁰ http://www.money.ro/antipa--primul-muzeu-din-tara-cu-facilitati-pentru-persoane-cu-handicap_1229867.html

¹¹ <http://prostemcell.org/testimoniale/testimonial-ciprian-anton.html>

¹² <http://www.imparte.ro/Povesti-adevarate/Povestea-fundatiei-lui-Mihai-Nesu-102.html>

In order to form an inclusive society, all its members should know the meaning of mutual understanding. No matter the obstacles one faces, life should be lived, every moment should be valued. This is valid for all of us.

6. Characteristic of Motivation Romania



<http://www.motivation.ro/>

The non-governmental organization Motivation Romania was established in 1995 as a result of a project of the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Motivation Charitable Trust in the UK. Ever since then this institution supported children and adults with disabilities from Romania, giving hope to more than 5.400 disabled people.

Motivation's main aim is to improve the quality of life of disabled people in Romania by:

- facilitating the access of people with disabilities to quality mobility equipment;
- helping disabled people have an independent and active life through adapted services;
- increasing community participation in service provision and changing the attitudes of people with or without disabilities;
- recognizing the human rights of persons with disabilities.

Motivation's first program consisted in wheelchair production for people facing motor disabilities. The wheelchairs Motivation produces are adapted to meet the physical and functional needs of each user. The foundation also provides an independent living training with the help of specialized instructors. Thus, disabled people learn how to correctly use a wheelchair, they learn about personal hygiene, sexuality, medical complications, social and school inclusion. The participants in this program are also encouraged to interact with the other members of the society.

Medical rehabilitation programs are also offered by Motivation. Motivation Medical Rehabilitation Clinic was opened in 2011. Specialists in medical rehabilitation meet the needs of disabled people in several areas: orthopaedics, neurology and rheumatology.

In order to avoid social exclusion of disabled people, Motivation created a special program in order to include persons with disabilities on the labor market. The program was developed through several projects:

- *Equal Opportunities for work inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in Romania*, project financed by European Social Fund over a period of 3 years from September 2009;
- *START for equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in the labor market*, financed by European Social Fund and implemented over a period of 3 years from November 2009;
- *Inclusion of people with disabilities on the labor market*, implemented by ActiveWatch;
- *Orizont 2009*, financed from European Social Fund for a period of 30 months starting June 1st 2010.

Another important project initiated by Motivation in 2002 is the IMPACT Romania project that ensured the transfer of 22 children with disabilities in three family-like group homes where the children are provided with special services to improve the quality of their lives by becoming active members of the society. Achieving support from the IMPACT Alliance, two grants from USAID-World Learning in 2002 – 2005, plus with the help of other funds from the European Commission, Timken Foundation, Co-operating Netherlands Foundations for Central and East Europe, Vodafone Foundation, United Way Romania, the project evolved. Another 37 children were transferred to family-like homes, foster families, 2 natural families and one psychiatric hospital. At the same time, a workshop was created as to help children learn how to obtain work opportunities. Children were included in public and special schools and they were also provided with special medical services.

Adaptive sports are as well an important part within the framework of Motivation. Every year, the foundation organizes the Motivation-Vodafone Swimming Competition in Bucharest, and also participates in the “24 Hour Swimming Marathon” organized in Brasov. In 2009, Motivation organized an international tournament in wheelchair tennis, “Motivation Romania Open 2009”.

Motivation's dream is to create a society where disabled people have a normal life. The way they live their lives should no longer be bound to their impairments. In order to achieve this, everyone's support is needed. Through the involvement of both people with or without disabilities, disabled people will be able to show to themselves and to the others what they are capable of.

Conclusions

Many people do not realize that disability can be looked at in more than one way. People normally see disability as an individual's problem, and they talk to disabled people about 'your disability'. We know that the problem is the barriers they face in life, as people with particular conditions or impairments. It is these barriers that disable them. And it is society, designed and run by non-disabled people, that puts those barriers up. It can take a while to grasp this idea but once you do it is liberating.

One possible way to change how the disabled are treated in Romania would be a change in mentality. Romanians should focus more on understanding not only the disabled, but all the vulnerable social categories in the country and across Europe. All Romanians should be aware of the notion of **empathy**. Once a situation is understood, it is easier to come up with solutions. There should be a class in school that deals with the social exclusion of different categories. This would mean greater awareness and children would learn at a young age the importance of being equal and helpful for those in need.

In order to exclude discrimination based on one's impairments, disability should also be more popularized through mass media. By promoting disabled people who overcame the barriers imposed by their impairments, managing to become active members of the society, the mentalities of not only disabled people but also of people without disabilities would change. Disabled people would gain confidence and hope in transforming their lives, they would become optimistic in changing themselves and in interacting with those around them. As for others, this would be an important lesson about life, the way they see those with disabilities being filled with respect. |

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Figures

Figure 1 - Negative consequences of a wrong mentality

Figure 2 - Social exclusion index value based on where people live with and without disabilities

Source: <http://europeandcis.undp.org>