

THE ECONOMIC PROGRESS OF A COUNTRY AND THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SOCIETY - WHERE ARE WE?

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Abstract.

The subject of disabled people began to be more and more debated in Romania, as well as in other countries. However, it is important to be aware of where we really stand when it comes to this topic. This article aims to highlight the existing relationship between the economic progress of a country and the social inclusion of people with disabilities. The major objective of this study is to make a comparison between what we want to have, to live, and what we actually have, and which we still do not live. The work is structured in three parts and follows the proposed goal.

Key words: *disability, people with disabilities, inclusion, economic progress, statistical report*

JEL Classification: *A10*

I. INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities have always existed, regardless of the historical, cultural, area, and the attitude towards this disadvantaged category has changed from marginalization and social exclusion to acceptance and community integration (Pavlencu, 2020).

The concept of disability has evolved throughout history both as a content and as a form of expression, in different periods of development to identify people who suffered from physical, sensory or mental ailments, the most diverse terminology was used: infirmity, invalidity, handicap, deficiency; this terminology evolved along with the evolution of the concept of fundamental human rights and, respectively, was strongly influenced by it (Cușca, 2022).

The concept of disability has evolved throughout history both in content and in form of expression; in the last period of time, both the terminology and the very concept of "disability" have undergone radical changes. The profound change in the concept of disability occurred with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which stopped treating disability as a negative characteristic of the individual, categorizing it as a problem of the entire society that cannot adapt to the individual needs of the person (Slusarenco, 2021).

In the opinion of the same previously cited author, society considers disabled people, most of the time, only as beneficiaries of social benefits or humanitarian aid and by no means as active members of society with rights and opportunities equal to those of others, that is, the attitude society, in general, is that of discrimination and marginalization of these people.

The integration and inclusion of people with disabilities are conditions for respecting the rights of every citizen; the fundamental principles, which have changed the realities in the field of quality of life, education and integration of people with disabilities in social life, are based on human rights (Cotelnic, 2017).

II. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES – POSSIBLE KEY PREMISES IN THE ECONOMIC PROGRESS OF A COUNTRY

There are people with disabilities who do not have access to at least secondary education and only to primary education, some people with disabilities who have primary/secondary/high school education want to continue their studies, but cannot do so because their family does not have the financial resources necessary, their health does not allow it, they need a personal assistant, they do not have physical accessibility conditions (Ciobanu, 2018).

It can be observed that on the promotion websites of some universities, in addition to information about the educational offer, the employment possibilities at the end of the studies, the services and support offered for students with disabilities are highlighted.

During the studies, the young person with disabilities will benefit from complex assistance, as support, facilitation and stimulation of the process of adaptation, development, professionalization and socialization, depending on the needs and expectations of the student and his family; complex assistance is provided by a large group of specialists (psychologists, teachers, sociologists, computer scientists, engineers, lawyers, etc.), coordinated from a common center (Diagonescu, 2019).

In the opinion of the previously cited author „the first thing a young person thinks about after graduating is how to get a job, the job he learned must provide him with an income, but, at the same time, open his horizons of communication and, respectively, of full integration into society: new relationships of collegiality and friendship, the power to decide and influence, the joy of achievements, etc. And young people with disabilities, just like their peers, think about a job, a position in a group, a job that will bring them not only financial satisfaction, but, above all, spiritual satisfaction; our benevolent attitude, the openness of society towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities will feed the aspirations of these young people to have a job, to enjoy all the rights, to have equal opportunities with other members of the community.”

In Romania on March 31, 2019, the total number of people with disabilities in Romania was 826,197, of which only 7.25% were currently employed (Socoliuc et al., 2019).

Also, on December 31, 2022, the total number of persons with disabilities communicated to the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity, through the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection of the county, respectively local sectors of the Bucharest municipality, was of 875,594 people (see Figure 1). Of these, 98.12% (859,176 people) are in the care of families and/or live independently (non-institutionalized) and 1.88% (16,418 people) are in public residential social assistance institutions for adults with disabilities (institutionalized) coordinated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity through the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see <https://anpd.gov.ro/web/transparenta/statistici/>).



Figure 1. The number of people with disabilities in Romania on December 31, 2022

Source: own processing according to the ANPD - National Authority for Persons with Disabilities 2022 report (<https://anpd.gov.ro/web/transparenta/statistici/>)

Regarding the number of people with disabilities who are students in Romania, I haven't found official public data at this moment, so I will bring as an example another country, also from the European Union, more specifically - Ireland.

Thus, for example in Ireland, according to the report *Students with Disabilities Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2020/21* (see <https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/Students%20with%20Disabilities%20Engaged%20with%20Support%20Services%20in%20Higher%20Education%20in%20Ireland%2020%2021.pdf>) there are 17,866 total students with disabilities (see Figure 2). Also, I believe that after the student period, a part of, if not all, these people, in Ireland, do not stop only at studies, but are also integrated in the field of work.

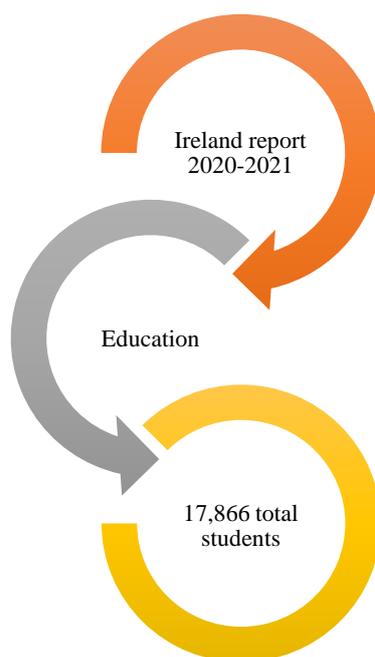


Figure 2. Number of disabled people who are students in Ireland in 2020-2021

Source: own processing according to the report *Students with Disabilities Engaged with Support Services in Higher Education in Ireland 2020/21* (<https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/Students%20with%20Disabilities%20Engaged%20with%20Support%20Services%20in%20Higher%20Education%20in%20Ireland%2020%2021.pdf>)

In conclusion, disability does not necessarily reflect a disadvantage, so in the opinion of Dumitrașcu (2020): „Are there advantages to a disability? Studies have shown that if a person loses an ability (for example seeing), the other senses develop much stronger capabilities to compensate for the loss.”

III. CONCLUSION

The social inclusion of people with disabilities is a current field of research, emerging from the fact that this population group continues to be marginalized and excluded from the life of society, the given situation is determined by the high level of discrimination and stigmatization, unequal opportunities, physical barriers and attitudes that prevail in society; at the same time, people with disabilities register the highest poverty rate, face shortages and have the lowest incomes compared to the general population; poverty has a direct impact on the state of health, participation and fulfillment of social roles by people with disabilities, which determines their exclusion and self-exclusion (Munteanu, 2018).

The difficulties faced by people with disabilities are social exclusion, unemployment, lack of access to inclusive education, limited access to the general social protection system, inaccessible environment, pressures towards institutionalization and discrimination (Meșter, 2021).

End notes

[1] The number of people institutionalized in public residential social assistance institutions for adults with disabilities under the methodological coordination of MMSS-ANPDPD

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