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*School-to-Work Transition for Higher education students with disabilities  
in Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro*



## School-to-Work Transition for Higher education students with disabilities in Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro Trans2Work

### DEV 3.1. Policy Plan

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13	University of Donja Gorica (UDG)	
14	Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro (AYDM)	
15	EMPLOYMENT AGENCY OF MONTENEGRO (EAM)	
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17	University of East Sarajevo (UES)	



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## Abbreviations

Term	Explanation
HEI	Higher Education Institution
SwD	Students with Disabilities
EU	European Union
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats



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## I. Introduction

School – to work transition for higher education students with disabilities is a complex process and it is necessary to set and understand the steps that need to be taken in order to ensure its successful realisation. Policy Plan, therefore, aims to define and describe concrete measures and activities supporting transition of students with disabilities from HEI to labour market. They are set out in following areas:

- Legal basis analyses ensuring the realization of persons with disabilities rights,
- Network development for supporting transition process for students with disabilities from HEI to labour market,
- Evaluation and monitoring transition process to ensure its quality and sustainability.

The rights of persons with disabilities are defined by United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. All the States Parties are committed and obliged to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity (Article 1.) They should contribute to the improvement of their social life and encourage them to participate in civil, political, economic, social and cultural areas offering equal opportunities in developing as well as in developed countries. In the context of transition process from education to labour market, the rights on education and employment of persons with disabilities are especially important. Therefore, the State Parties will ensure that persons with disabilities learn and develop life/social skills which will facilitate their full and equal participation in education and community. States Parties (Article 27.) shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia:

- a. Prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions;



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- b. Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances;
- c. Ensure that persons with disabilities are able to exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others;
- d. Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
- e. Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;
- f. Promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business;
- g. Employ persons with disabilities in the public sector;
- h. Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures;
- i. Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace;
- j. Promote the acquisition by persons with disabilities of work experience in the open labour market;
- k. Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities.

In the broadest sense, this means that the persons with disabilities have equal rights to work and to be competitive at the labour market according to their skills and competencies. Positive discrimination could also be justified while employing persons with disabilities since its aim is to contribute to their social inclusion. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a base for developing European and national legal basis regulating and protecting rights of persons with disabilities and forbidding discrimination.

Considering basic values and recommendations of Convention, Project *School – to – Work Transition for Higher Institution students with disabilities in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro* has been designed to:

- Upgrade and prepare HEIs services to support SwD to their transition from HE to Work following the EU policies,
- Link Higher Education to “disability friendly” work environments,





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- Assimilate transition opportunities and skills with EU practices and policies and
- To prepare employers on understanding the needs of employees with disabilities in order to offer new job.

The Project is being implemented in three countries with similar social context and all of them are preparing to enter European Union. Therefore, it was important to analyse legal basis in the area of the rights of persons with disabilities and to identify weaknesses and threats, strengths and opportunities for realization of Project activities.

## **II. Legal framework for implementation of Rights on Education and employment of Persons with disabilities in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro**

International and national legislation should always be a starting point when planning strategies of development in certain area. Therefore, one of the Project objectives was the examination of the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities and their transition from education to labour market in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. That was done by SWOT analyses, need analyses of students and employers.

According to the results, we can conclude that **current legislation in the Project countries is corresponding with international documents regulating the rights of persons with disabilities**. It means that there are no legal barriers for education and employment of people with disabilities. **Discrimination of people with disabilities is being formally forbidden and their rights are protected by certain institutions and instruments**. Beside the governmental institutions responsible for the protection of rights of persons with disabilities in all three countries, **there are also formal and non-formal associations, nongovernmental organizations supporting the social inclusion of persons with disabilities and fighting against the stereotypes and prejudices**.

Hence, to have a clearer review and to understand the status of persons with disabilities in educational system or labour market, contextual approach is needed. Namely, one of the greatest facing problems in all Project countries is the discrepancy between labour market needs and educational system. **Bologna process at universities is being implemented partially and reforms are not fast enough to meet the labour market needs**. The implementation of very important idea of Bologna process, based on interdisciplinary approach, credit transfer and enabling mobility to ensure the possibility of developing different skills and competencies and increasing competitiveness, is being very slow in practice. **High rate of unemployment**



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in all three countries is a great social problem and it is a symptom of undeveloped economy. **Need analyses of students with disabilities** has shown that students are pretty aware of current situation at labour market and **they are worried about their status regarding the specific needs they have at workplace.** Employers show similar fear when it comes to hiring persons with disabilities. **Employers are also worried for possible insufficient productivity of employees with disabilities and the costs that engagement of persons with disabilities could cause.** Costs are mostly connected to additional equipment or frequent sick-leaves.

**Employers and students with disabilities** both state the need for policy changes in the field of employment of persons with disabilities. They need **material support, information provision, facilitation in organizing work environment to provide optimal conditions for functioning at workplace, support through education of experts dealing with identification of possibilities, potentials and competencies of persons with disabilities and creating the programmes of first orientation to help other employees to adjust to the new situation.**

The transition of students with disabilities from higher education institutions to labour market can only be successfully realized with the developed infrastructure that includes all interested parties.

### **III. Support network to transition process of students with disabilities from education to labor market**

Development of infrastructure and support network to transition process of students with disabilities from education to labor market is a key element for the successful realization of this process. The network must encompass and include the following participants: higher education institutions, students, employers, transitional institutions / services.

**1) Higher education institutions** have an extremely significant role when we talk about the transition from the world of education into the labor market. In addition to professional knowledge that students gain during their studies, after graduating from the higher education institution students need to have an additional set of skills that are generic, but at the same time extremely important for their orientation in the labor market. The combination of these two types of skills (technical and generic) makes graduating students competitive in the labor market.

**Students with disabilities** are faced with daily difficulties in their environment related to the prevalence of physical environmental barriers, and overcoming the negative expectations of people in their environment. In the context of educational institutions, students with disabilities should be provided with support in overcoming these difficulties. The transition to



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the labor market presents a new set of challenges, structurally very similar to those that students with disabilities face in the context of educational institutions, but still significantly more complex. Consequently, there is the responsibility of higher education institutions to prepare their students with disabilities to face these challenges. This among other things implies the formation of a transitional curriculum with the purpose of defining the skills and competencies required for the transition from education into world of work. This means that within the regular study programs, some activities that will ease the transition to the labor market to all students, especially to students with disabilities, have to be integrated. Students require job search skills and the basic information about how labor organizations, that might be potential employers, function. Training programs, as a part of the study, can help graduates in successfully entering the labor market.

In addition, students who do not suffer from any kind of disabilities, should be informed about the ways how to understand the difficulties faced by today's students - tomorrow's colleagues with disabilities. It is therefore important to bring students into situations that will enable acceptance and understanding of the other and different in various social contexts. This approach should ease the adjustment of both groups in the working environment where they work together. The coexistence of students with and without disabilities, besides providing information about the possibilities and skills of students with disabilities, will cause that students without disabilities have less prejudices and more realistic expectations if they are in a position to hire a person with disabilities in their working environment.

On the other hand, students with disabilities need to be proactive in acquiring the skills that will make them more competitive in the labor market. Aware of their sensitive position in society, students with disabilities are often exposed to invest additional effort to affirm their own capabilities and quality. Demystifying disability is an extremely important activity that people with disabilities can do. Informing their colleagues about the nature of the disability, finding the best ways of supporting them and reacting in different situations will significantly contribute to breaking the prejudices and fears of the environment when it comes to cooperation with persons with disabilities.

- 2) **Employers** have a moral and legal responsibility not to discriminate persons with disabilities during the employment process. Practice shows that employers face a whole set of fears and misconceptions about the abilities of persons with disabilities, which then leads to the fact that employers rarely decide to hire them. In order to fulfill their obligation, employers should actively be involved and collaborate with higher education institutions and transitional institutions in order to overcome these problems when it comes to hiring people with disabilities.



People who are responsible for the selection of new staff and for creating new job positions should receive adequate education about different types of difficulties. Moreover, they need to be taught how to create new job positions so that they and people with certain disabilities can perform them. Adjustment of the physical environment and the various types of assistive technology products can help in providing equal opportunities for the employee with disabilities to perform a job.

Human Resource experts in the context of work organizations are responsible for educating other employees about the characteristics, abilities and needs of their colleagues with disabilities. In order to achieve this goal, professionals who work with disabled people at higher education institutions have to provide constant education for managers and Human Resource experts. Additionally, the transitional institutions need to provide permanent counseling services in order to overcome the current problems.

- 3) The role of **transitional institutions** is reflected in the establishment of a bridge between higher education institutions and the labor market. This bridge should enable graduates to have an easier transition into the job market. Due to the sensitive position of students with disabilities, transitional institutions have a responsibility to additionally encourage their integration into the labor market. Career advising centers and centers to support students with disabilities need, in addition to counseling students, to provide counseling to employers who want to and already have employees with disabilities. The purpose of this counseling would be to overcome everyday problems faced by employers who hire persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities as well.

The different roles of the above mentioned participants in transition process of students with disabilities from higher education institutions into the labor market define **measures and actions** that need to be taken. These are:

- To identify students with disabilities.
- To identify and analyze the needs of employers and students with disabilities.
- To create web tools that will help:
  - a. *employers* to identify people for specific job positions, and designed to meet the specific demands of employers and
  - b. *students* with disabilities to identify their interests and educational needs.
- To create a portal that will connect employers, people with disabilities and persons responsible for the development of educational programs for people with disabilities at the level of each partner country.
- To inform all interested parties about the existence and the possibilities of using this platform through seminars, workshops, information brochures and / or electronic materials.



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- To train:
  - a. teaching staff,
  - b. employers and
  - c. students with disabilities to manage their careers.
- To strengthen the role of career centers / to establish career centers, and to establish and define the role of a mentor.
- To increase the awareness of employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities.
- To increase awareness and to motivate employers to participate in transition process of students with disabilities to the labor market and to increase the number of highly educated students with disabilities who are employed.

All mentioned steps are important and needed in the transition process of students with disabilities from higher education institution to labor market. Project *Trans2work* will pilot the process in whole and discover possible gaps and barriers.

#### **IV. Monitoring and evaluation of transition process of students with disabilities from higher education to the labor market**

Monitoring and evaluation of transition process of students with disabilities from higher education to the labor market ensure the future implementation of activities considered in a policy plan.

The process of monitoring and evaluation should include **continuous periodic analysis of the needs of students with disabilities and employers**, as well as the statistical analysis of the number of students with disabilities who can manage to be employed after graduating. At the same time, higher education institutions should regularly evaluate the transitional curriculum and internship programs, and, in accordance with the needs, should be updated.

Monitoring and evaluation ensure the feedback on realized activities, but they are also important for planning all phases of transition process from higher education to labor market and improve them at the same time. This means that monitoring and evaluation are not only project activities but part of the mentioned process whenever the process is going on.



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