

LABOUR MARKET (RE-) INTEGRATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Country note

This country note has been prepared for the European Training Foundation by Sabira Gadzo-Sasic. ETF's Piotr Stronkowski steered the elaboration process and reviewed the draft report.

Author(s): Sabira Gadzo-Sasic

Peer reviewer(s): Piotr Stronkowski *ETF

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PREFACE

The Country Note presents the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina related to labour market integration and skills development for persons with disabilities with special attention on the role of Active Labour Market Policy and Measures.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) initiated a mapping of policies and programmes for labour market (re-)integration and skills development for persons with disabilities in several Partner countries, in response to the European Union's priority to foster social inclusion and economic autonomy of persons with disabilities through employment, as per priorities set out in the EU Disability Employment Package.

The main objectives were to conduct a systemic, comparative policy analysis of the support for employment of persons with disabilities and to identify needs for strengthening the capacity of actors in selected EU neighbouring countries.

The analysis was conducted in accordance with the framework proposed by the EU Disability Employment Package, with a particular focus on Active Labour Market Policies and skills development dimensions.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the methodology consisted of desk review and face-to-face and online interviews with main stakeholders active in the area of promotion of employment and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The detailed list of interviewees appears in annex.

1. CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), with the Federation being divided into 10 cantons, and the Republika Srpska (RS) – and Brčko District (BD).

According to the 2013 census, Bosnia and Herzegovina had 3.5 million inhabitants, of which 294 000 (8.3%) were Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), more specifically 181 900 in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; 102 700 in RS; and 9 400 in Brčko District. The population census is the only official data on the number of PwDs. However, the actual number of PwDs is most likely higher.

As in other regions and countries, the PwDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are faced with challenges in what regards access to and retention in labour market and employment. Although improving after the pandemic disruption, the economic situation including job generation and capacity of private sector to accommodate workers with disabilities further complicates the improvement in disability policy. The consequences of the latest crises negatively affected the achievement of policy goals, such as increasing public investments and faster alignment of Bosnia and Herzegovina legal framework with that of the EU¹.

Close to two thirds of the total adult population of PwDs live either close to or below the poverty line. Significant social, educational, economic, physical and transportation-related barriers prevent the majority of PwDs from enjoying their basic rights. This situation has a negative impact on the economy and quality of life for PwDs.

¹ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Transition Report 2023-24, [online]. Last accessed 17 December 2024. Available at: <https://www.ebrd.com/news/publications/transition-report/transition-report-202324.html>.

2. STRATEGIC AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a complex system of multi-level governance in the field of disability policy at both the entity and BD levels. The main policy objective with regard to PwDs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including in FBiH, RS and BD, is to enable all PwDs to achieve the highest quality of life potential, respect and dignity, independence, productivity and equal participation in society in the most productive and accessible environment possible.

2.1 Institutional framework

Entity ministries (the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the FBiH, the Ministry of Labour and Veterans and Disability Protection of the RS) and entity employment institutes play a significant role in the creation of employment policy for PwDs. The aforementioned ministries develop laws and procedures that impact policy of PwDs, including in the field of employment. The entity ministries also establish principles for the internal organisation of ministries and other administrative bodies and organisations. The ministries also secure funds for professional rehabilitation and employment of PwDs (further details in section 5.2.).

The employment offices established at entity and Brčko District level are public institutions that keep records of unemployed people, including PwDs. The entity employment institutes keep records of unemployed war-disabled persons and other PwDs; where available, these records can be disaggregated by gender and other key demographic characteristics. In the Republika Srpska, the Employment Institute also has an operational role in implementing active labour market measures, including employment and self-employment support programmes in which persons with disabilities may be treated as a priority target group. Its role therefore goes beyond maintaining records and includes activation, referral, participation in employment support measures, and cooperation with public and non-public actors involved in the labour market integration of PwDs.

The non-governmental sector plays a special role in the employment of PwDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly with regard to advocating for PwDs rights, including their right to work (for example, NGOs such as Moja prava, Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina, People in Need), as well as through opportunities for direct employment in the so-called 'social enterprises' (e.g. NGO ProReha, IC Lotos).

2.2 Coordination and cooperation mechanisms

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the entities ministries - the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in FBiH and the Ministry of Labour and Veterans and Disability Protection in RS - are responsible for special schemes for supporting PwDs employment, i.e. Funds for the professional rehabilitation and employment of PwDs. Both entities have clear cooperation framework between the representatives of competent ministries and those acting on behalf of the Funds.

In FBiH, the work of the Federal Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of PwDs is regulated by the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of PwDs. According to the provisions of that law, the fund performs the following tasks: '[implementing] the policy of development and improvement of professional rehabilitation and employment of PwDs, except educational institutions whose main activity is the acquisition of primary and secondary education; [financing] and co-finances programmes for the development of economic companies for the employment of PwDs and protective workshops; [making] payments of monetary compensations and incentives; [financing] and [co-financing] programmes to maintain employment of disabled person; [supervising] the realisation of the right to financial compensation and incentives and the use of other resources of the Fund, [supervising] the calculation of financial compensation for companies that

employ PwDs and the credibility of the attached evidence and other documents (Article 54), and other tasks foreseen by the Decision on the Foundation of the Fund and the Statute of the Fund' (Article 58). The Fund has a management body, a leader body and a supervisory body. The governing body acts as Director of the Fund, and the conditions for their appointment are established in the Founding Act. The leader body of the Fund is the Board of Directors, which has seven members, three of whom are members representatives of organisations of PwDs, who are the founders or owners of institutions and commercial companies for professional rehabilitation and employment of PwDs. The supervisory board, which has five members, is the body that controls the operations of the Fund.

In RS, the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled is a public institution established by the entity government (the Ministry of Labour and Veterans' Disability Protection of the RS). The Fund is managed by a board of at least seven members, which may only be appointed and dismissed by the government of the entity, so that representatives of employers, trade unions and organisations of the disabled – organised at the level of the entity – are represented. The Board of Directors of the Fund ensures and promotes equal representation based on gender in management and decision-making while the decisions of the Management Board are executed by the Director of the Fund, who is also appointed by the entity government. As evidenced above, a clear partnership exists between the public authorities and the organisations receiving funding.

In RS, cooperation should also be understood as involving the Employment Institute of the Republika Srpska, particularly in relation to the registration and activation of unemployed persons with disabilities, implementation of employment and self-employment measures, and participation in domestic and international projects aimed at strengthening labour market inclusion. The Institute's role is complementary to that of the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities.

All actors that have been interviewed underlined the importance of cooperation between the non-governmental organisations and public authorities. For example, non-governmental organisation, such as NGO ProReha, My Rights, Udruženje Amputiraca [Association of Amputees-UDAS], People in Need, as well as the Lotos Information Centre and Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina work on the implementation of certain projects which include PwDs from across Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Although there are no negative experiences related to the cooperation between actors operating in this area, as the representative of the Federal Employment Office pointed out, 'a large number of actors operating in a certain area can sometimes be a challenge'.

Interview participants explained that priorities can shift between government mandates. One government may focus on employing PwDs and addressing the barriers they face. However, once the mandate ends, a new government may come into power and change direction. They also noted that although many actors work on this issue and share similar goals, disagreements often arise regarding what the priorities should be. As a result, their efforts may overlap or even conflict, especially when it comes to promoting the employment of specific categories of PwDs.

2.3 Legislative framework

The key laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina that regulate employment support policies for PwDs are the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities FBiH and the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Disabled Persons RS.

The provisions of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities FBiH (2010) regulate: basic provisions (professional rehabilitation, training and employment of PwDs with reduced working capacity – Art. 1-7), professional rehabilitation and training (Art. 8-14), employment and work of PwDs under general and special conditions (Art. 15-36), employment relationship and records of employed PwDs (Art. 37-38), rehabilitation funds/means and employment of PwDs (Art. 39), management, leadership and other bodies in institutions and companies for professional rehabilitation and employment of PwDs (Art. 40 -47); benefits for the

employment of PwDs (Art. 48-56); establishment and operation of the Fund for professional rehabilitation, training and employment of PwDs (Art. 57-65); supervision (Art. 66); penal provisions (Art. 67); and transitional and final provisions (Art. 68-73).

The Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Disabled Persons of the RS governs the basic provisions (regulates the rights, conditions and procedure of professional rehabilitation, training and employment of PwDs and reduced working capacity, art. 1), disability and reduced work ability ('a person with a disability and disabled person with suspected work ability was defined' – Art. 2-7); professional rehabilitation and training (Art. 8-10); employment and work of disabled persons (Art. 11- 33); records of disabled persons (Art. 34), establishment and work of institutions for professional rehabilitation (Art. 35-37); Joint provisions (management committee, director, professional committee). 38-43; establishment and operation of the Fund for disabled persons (Art. 57); 58), transitional and final provisions (Art. 59).

In addition to the laws outlined above, laws that also regulate the rights of PwDs in the FBiH in the field of work include the Labour Law, the Law on Mediation in Employment and Social Security of the Unemployed, the Law on Pension Disability Insurance, and the Law on the Rights of Veterans and Their Family Members in the FBiH.

In the Republika Srpska, the rights of PwDs are additionally regulated by the provisions of the Labour Law of the RS, the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance of the RS, and the Law on the Rights of Veterans, Military Invalids and Families of Fallen Veterans of the Defense and Patriotic War of the RS.

For the BD, it is important to mention the Law on Supplementary Rights of Families of Fallen Soldiers and War disabilities BD and the BD Labour Law. At the end of 2025, the Law on Vocational Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities was adopted, with its implementation and administrative operability expected during 2026.

2.4 Strategic framework

The policy in the field of disability on the state level² (Bosnia and Herzegovina) was adopted in 2008 and, in that document, it is stated that 'poverty and unemployment affect PwDs the most, and even those who are employed are most often on minimum incomes' (POI, 2008:6).

After the adoption of the Disability Policy (2008), the entities adopted strategies to improve the rights and standing of PwDs.

So, on the basis of that document, the operational document: Strategy for Equalising Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in FBiH 2011-2015 was drawn up. After that period ended, a working group for the creation of the Strategy for Equalising Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in FBiH for the period up to 2021, which included representatives of all departments of importance for the position of PwDs and representatives of organisations of PwDs was created and adopted a Strategy for Equalising Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in FBiH for the period from 2016 to 2021³. The Strategy defined strategic priorities, goals and activities in the field of disability in the FBiH based on the principles contained in the earlier strategy. The FBiH 2016-2021 Strategy for Improving the Rights and Standing of Persons with Disabilities, in the section 'Professional rehabilitation and employment', indicates that '[t]he best way for society to support PwDs is to create conditions for their employment and integration into the community'.

This document places particular focus on the importance of the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, and the activities that the Fund implements

² Institute for Social and Health Policies (IBHI), *Politika u oblasti invalidnosti*, [online]. Last accessed 5 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.ibhi.ba/Documents/Publikacije/2008/Politika%20u%20oblasti%20invalidnosti.pdf>.

³ Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Strategija za unapređenje prava i položaja osoba sa invaliditetom*, [online]. Last accessed 7 November 2024. Available at: https://fbihvlada.gov.ba/uploads/documents/strategija-za-unapredenje-prava-i-polozaja-osoba-sa-invalidite-compressed_1640955588.pdf.

through programmes in this area is highlighted. The Strategy for Improving the Rights and Position of PwDs for the FBiH for the period until 2030 is still in preparation.

Similar strategies were adopted at the level of the RS entity. The Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities in Republika Srpska 2010-2015 was prepared by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), and based on the analyses carried out, it was concluded that the new Strategy must define long-term goals for a period of 10 years. The areas covered by the 2010-2015 Strategy are: the standing of PwDs in legislation and their participation in public and political life; the economic independence of PwDs and economic benefits; employment and professional rehabilitation; social security matters for PwDs and social support; health care, rehabilitation and disability assessment; education and training, culture – personal integrity, information, communications, awareness raising, religion, family life, sports and recreation, accessibility and organisation of PwDs.

The Strategy of the RS for the period 2017-2026⁴ envisages the vision of creating a society of equal opportunities and implementing activities on equal participation of PwDs in civil, political, economic, social and cultural areas of life.

Also, the entity's Social Inclusion Strategies for the period 2021-2027 are significant for the employment of PwDs. The Social Inclusion Strategy 2021-2027 for Brčko was also adopted.

In the Social Inclusion Strategy of the Republika Srpska⁵, in the section (3.4.3.) on the discrimination of PwDs, it is stated that 'access to life in the community, adequate housing, sensitive health care, work on the market, public services, are just some of the areas in which the goals of social inclusion of persons with disabilities can be achieved'.

In the Social Inclusion Strategy of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina⁶, in the section on labour activation (p. 64), it is stated that 'persons with disabilities are still particularly discriminated against in the labour market because, despite being allocated to active employment policies, they do not have physical access to work everywhere due to inadequate infrastructure (sidewalks, public transport, various facilities and public institutions).'

In the Strategy of the Brčko District⁷ in the context of the work of PwDs, it is stated that 'by including in the labour market, socially excluded categories become economically independent, which the burden and social allocations from the Brčko District budget are reduced, and at the same time it contributes to their faster resocialisation' (p. 39).

2.5 Sources of financing

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, entity funds for professional rehabilitation, training and employment of PwDs provide dedicated measures supporting the employment of PwDs. Public employment services also implement broader active labour market measures that can support PwDs, including through employer subsidies and self-employment support.

⁴ Government of Republika Srpska, *Strategija unapređenja društvenog položaja lica sa invaliditetom*, [online]. Last accessed 8 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.vladars.net/sr-SP-Cyrl/Vlada/Ministarstva/MZSZ/dokumenti/Documents/Strategija%20unapre%C4%91enja%20dru%C5%A1tvenog%20polo%C5%BEaja%20lica%20sa%20invaliditetom.pdf>.

⁵ UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Strategija socijalne uključenosti Republike Srpske 2021-2027*, [online]. Last accessed 8 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/bih/media/6496/file/Strategija%20socijalne%20uklju%C4%8Denosti%20Republike%20Srpske%202021-2027.pdf>.

⁶ UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Strategija socijalnog uključivanja Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine za period 2021-2027*, [online]. Last accessed 9 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/bih/media/6491/file/Strategija%20socijalnog%20uklju%C4%8Divanja%20Federacije%20Bosne%20i%20Hercegovine%20za%20period%202021-2027.pdf>.

⁷ UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Strategija socijalnog uključivanja Brčko distrikta BiH 2021-2027*, [online]. Last accessed 1 December 2024. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/bih/media/6486/file/Strategija%20socijalnog%20uklju%C4%8Divanja%20Br%C4%8Dko%20distrikta%20BiH%202021-2027.pdf>.

The sources of financing are determined by Article 18 of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the FBiH. According to this provision, all employers who do not employ a person with a disability, and are obliged to do so, are required to pay 25% of the average salary in the Federation to the FBiH Fund for each person with a disability that they are obliged to employ. The FBiH Fund is also financed in such a way that the Employment Office allocates 10% of the budget to the Fund's programme and 5% to the cantonal employment service. According to the information obtained from the interview, 'since its foundation (2011), the fund has awarded about 1 500 incentives for self-employment of PwDs and about 7 000 incentives for employment of PwDs. At the beginning, it was 30 people, and later there was a period when annual employment was up to 1 000 people.'

Similar provisions are contained in the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Disabled Persons of the Republika Srpska. Article 16 of the mentioned law states that an employer who is subject to the obligation of quota employment of PwDs, who has not fulfilled this obligation, is obliged to pay a special contribution in the amount of 0.2% of the paid monthly gross salary of all employees to the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities every month when paying salaries. In RS, the Fund has contributed towards the realisation of the rights of over 4 500 PwDs since 2005. In this regard, since the establishment of the RS Fund (in 2005), as the interlocutor told us, 'more than 55 million Konvertibilna Marka (Convertible Mark-KM) (EUR 28 305 978.01) has been invested in the return of contributions, which is about 3 300 beneficiaries. As for financial incentives for self-employment in the form of the establishment of an agricultural economy, invested is KM 6 724 161.99 (EUR 3 460 617.84). The RS Fund also invested KM 2 004 621 (EUR 1 031 686.51) in support for 13 associations for PwDs.' According to data available on the website of the Fund, in the last year (2023) alone, the Fund allocated KM 434 000 (EUR 223 359.90) for the employment of 36 PwDs (KM 252 000/EUR 129 629.50), self-employment for 20 (KM 140 000/EUR 72 051.58) and establishing six commercial farms (KM 42 000/EUR 21 615.47).

In addition to the Fund's dedicated measures, the Employment Institute of the Republika Srpska implements employment and self-employment programmes through public employment support instruments. These programmes may include subsidies to employers and support for self-employment, with persons with disabilities among the priority categories. This should be considered when assessing the overall scope of public support for the employment of persons with disabilities in RS.

In BD, benefits are set aside for employable categories that are considered more difficult, including PwDs.

Some PwDs are also employed through projects implemented by non-governmental organisations (People in Need, ProReha, Lotos), some activities being financed via international and EU funding.

3. POLICIES SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

PwDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be employed under general and special conditions. Employment under general conditions according to entity laws on professional rehabilitation and employment of PwDs include the so-called quota-employed PwDs. Employment under special conditions means the employment of PwDs in an institution or protective workshop established for the purpose of employing PwDs. Self-employment, i.e. founding one's own company and carrying out independent activities, and employment in a family business are also considered employment under special conditions.

Public employment services contribute to the employability of persons with disabilities through the registration of unemployed persons, identification of their labour market status, referral to available measures and participation in employment support programmes. In the Republika Srpska, the Employment Institute is an important actor in this respect, particularly through its records of unemployed persons with disabilities and its role in active employment and self-employment support measures.

In FBiH, the services/programmes provided by the Fund are programmes that are published through public calls. Therefore, all employers who employ PwDs can apply through the public call and exercise the right to tax and customs reliefs and/or incentives provided for in the contract on employment of PwDs. Also, entities/actors that employ disabled persons, including organisations of persons with disabilities, have the right to financial compensation of paid contributions for pension and disability insurance; paid contribution for health insurance; paid contribution for unemployment insurance and income tax. The aforementioned rights are regulated by the FBiH Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (Article 48 and 51).

In the RS, employers who employ PwDs benefit from tax relief and the right to a financial incentive foreseen in a special contract regarding the employment of PwDs. Access to financial incentives is secured regardless of whether the employed disabled person was previously registered as unemployed with the Employment Service. The incentives include one-time material benefits, funds for adjusting the workplace and working conditions, credit funds on more favourable terms for the purchase of machines, equipment, tools or accessories necessary for the employment of PwDs, and compensation for the difference due to reduced work performance or for co-financing part of the PwD assistant's salary. These rights are prescribed by the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of the Disabled RS (Article 44), and all employers, as stated by the interviewed representative of the RS Fund, 'who employ a person with a disability to exercise their rights may apply directly to the Fund.'

Since its establishment in 2010, the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of PwDs of FBiH has supported the employment of 3 545 PwDs and provided 7 092 employment incentives, of which 1 357 supported professional rehabilitation programmes and 5 698 supported employment programmes⁸.

According to interlocutors from the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities of the Republika Srpska, since the establishment of the Fund there have been 3 300 users of contribution refunds, of whom half are still active. Self-employment for 1 983 people has also been supported through the Fund. According to the Fund's website, 62 people were employed thanks to the Fund in RS in 2023⁹.

⁸ Federal Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Official Website, [online]. Last accessed 7 December 2024. Available at: <https://fond.ba/>.

⁹ Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities of Republika Srpska, Official Website, [online]. Last accessed 29 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.fondinhrs.org/>.

In BD, there is no specific data on the number of employed PwDs due to absence of specific regulation of classification of such categories of beneficiaries. According to the interviewed director of the BD Employment Office, 'the database of unemployed PwDs for the BD will be created after the introduction of the law on vocational rehabilitation, which is currently in process of preparation.'

According to currently available data in FBiH, since the beginning of 2024, 3 570 non-war disabled persons, of which about 1 530 women with disabilities, are registered. About 2 700 war-disabled veterans are registered, of which 65 are women¹⁰.

As for the Republika Srpska, according to data from the Employment Institute of the RS, 1 119 PwDs were registered as unemployed in 2024, compared with 1 239 in 2023.

3.1 Services supporting the employability of persons with disabilities

Services that support the employability of PwDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina remain underdeveloped. Although the laws on professional rehabilitation, training and employment of PwDs prescribe rehabilitation and training measures, which some surveyed actors (RS Fund, FBiH Fund, FBiH Employment Institute, ProReha) described as key to employment, rehabilitation services are not provided on a continuous basis.

There is also limited dedicated job counselling for PwDs. Although such services were provided in the past, an interlocutor from an employment institute noted that this type of support is not currently provided to persons with disabilities on a systematic basis. Nor are activities focused on reaching inactive jobseekers sufficiently developed.

For some PwDs in FBiH, it is possible to obtain a driving licence financed through the FBiH Fund. As the representative of the FBiH Fund points out, this can make them more efficient if they are already in a particular workplace and can also enable them to find adequate employment more easily. In addition, young PwDs in FBiH may exercise their right to finance their education through the Fund, which, in turn, makes them more competitive on the labour market after completing their studies.

Therefore, employers may obtain relevant information through both the public employment services and the Funds for professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities. In RS, the Employment Institute maintains records of unemployed persons with disabilities and should be recognised as an important source of information and referral for employers, while the RS Fund provides dedicated financial and professional rehabilitation support instruments. Consolidation of comprehensive data sets on PwDs is recommended, regardless of labour market status.

3.2 Measures supporting the employability of persons with disabilities

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, employment programmes for persons with disabilities are provided primarily through the entity Funds for professional rehabilitation and employment, while public employment services also implement broader active labour market programmes that may include persons with disabilities as a priority group. In this regard, as we learned from the interviewed representative, the FBiH Fund offers four different programmes:

- a programme for maintaining the current level of employment of PwDs;
- a programme for the development of companies for the employment of PwDs and protective workshops;

¹⁰ Federal Employment Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Official Website, [online]. Last accessed 29 November 2024. Available at: <https://www.fzzz.ba/>.

- a sustainability programme for the current level of employment of PwDs who are self-employed or active in agriculture as main/basic occupation;
- employment sustainability programme for PwDs employed in organisations of PwDs.

The FBiH Fund also implements three subprogrammes: (i) subprogramme for the professional rehabilitation of PwDs for companies employing PwDs, protective workshops and other legal entities according to the Law; (ii) subprogramme for the professional rehabilitation of PwDs of institutions for professional rehabilitation, secondary schools and other educational institutions; (iii) professional rehabilitation subprogrammes to which disabled persons apply themselves.

In the Republika Srpska, the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment provides reimbursement of contributions; financial incentives for employment, self-employment or registration of a commercial agricultural enterprise; sustainability of employment; economic support; special benefits and financial resources for professional rehabilitation.

In the Republika Srpska, the Employment Institute also implements employment and self-employment programmes, including subsidy-based support, in which persons with disabilities may be prioritised. This role should be viewed as complementary to the Fund's dedicated professional rehabilitation and employment instruments.

The Professional Rehabilitation Service at the RS Fund was established in 2024 and aims to focus more on quality professional rehabilitation. As the interlocutor from the Fund said: 'this is an extremely important activity that has not been implemented to its full capacity.'

Professional rehabilitation is, as pointed out, an activity that is insufficiently implemented in the Federation as well. As the interlocutors (ProReha, Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina) have made clear, 'amendments to the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment, which covers professional rehabilitation, are in preparation process. This is a guarantee that in the future special focus will be placed on professional rehabilitation.'

3.3 Measures addressing the needs of war veterans

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the disabled war veterans are in a more favourable position than disabled persons who were born with more severe impairments and those who acquired their disability in peacetime conditions.

Disabled war veterans avail of their rights (disability benefits) in the case of having 20% disability, civilian victims of war may do so in the case of 60% disability, and peacetime disabled military veterans in the case of 90% disability (the percentage of disability is determined based on a medical assessment). In light of the above, it may be concluded that the PwDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not benefit from similar benefits regardless the cause of disability. In addition to the above, interviewees/participants mentioned that employment programmes for veterans existed before and still some exist now, but given that the war happened decades ago, most of these people are in the pre-retirement age range. As stated by the interlocutor in the interview (ProReha), disabled war veterans are, 'after 30 years from the end of war suffering, in the pre-retirement phase of life. For this category of PwDs, retraining for new jobs is less often organised, due to limited impact considering their age. In the aftermath of the war, many programmes were implemented to support the employment of war invalids, as well as their children. Among the war invalids, all those who were actively looking for a job and who wanted to participate in the labour market had the opportunity to get a job.'

Therefore, it may be concluded that disabled war veterans are in a better position in all areas, including work and employment, compared to other categories of PwDs. Nevertheless, accessibility remains a challenge for all categories of PwDs, veterans or not.

3.4 Enhancing the capacity of main stakeholders

There are no institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina that exclusively deal with the training and rehabilitation of PwDs. The need for these specialised institutions was particularly noticed by certain non-governmental organisations (ProReha, Caritas). This was pointed out to the representatives of public authorities, and it is expected that more focus will be placed on this type of services.

Strengthening the capacity of public employment services, including the Employment Institute of the Republika Srpska, should also be considered a priority. This includes improving staff capacity to work with unemployed persons with disabilities, developing more tailored counselling and activation approaches, improving cooperation with employers, and ensuring better links between employment services, the RS Fund, social services, education providers and NGOs.

4. POLICIES SUPPORTING DEMAND FOR EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

PwDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be employed under general and special conditions. Employment under general conditions, according to entity laws on professional rehabilitation and employment of PwDs, include the so-called ‘disability quota.’

Table 1: Disability quota in the FBiH and RS

FBiH	RS
According to the provisions of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of PwDs, the FBiH quota system means that every 16 th employee should be a person with a disability. Entities that do not fulfil the obligation are obliged to pay a special amount of 0.5% of the paid monthly gross salary of all employees to the Fund every month (Articles 18 and 19).	The Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities of RS quota system means that compulsory employment of PwDs includes their employment in state administration bodies, judicial bodies and other state bodies, local government bodies, public service, institutions and funds, and companies owned or majority-owned by the RS. An employer who is subject to this obligation, but has not fulfilled it, is obliged to pay a special contribution of 0.2% of the paid monthly gross salary of all employees to the Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of PwDs every month during the payment of wages (Article 16).

Source: Author

In the FBiH, special conditions mean that PwDs are employed in an institution, or a company established for the purpose of employing PwDs. Employment under special conditions, in the sense of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the FBiH, means employment in organisations of PwDs, and self-employment (starting a trade, performing independent activities, and performing agricultural activities as the only and main occupation). PwDs with at least 60% disability, persons with at least 70% physical impairment – if this impairment results in a reduction in their ability to work – and persons with a mild to moderate intellectual disability have the right to employment under special conditions (Article 15).

In RS, employment of PwDs under special conditions (Article 15 of the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities of RS) includes employment in an institution, company or protective workshop established for the purpose of employing PwDs (protective workshop) which, on the basis of working and general abilities cannot be employed on the open labour market or maintain their employment. Employment under special conditions also includes self-employment (founding own company and performing independent activities), and employment in a family business.

According to the information received from the interlocutors, many employers in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not ready to employ a person with a disability. The reasons listed are numerous, and some of the most frequently mentioned are prejudices against PwDs and the lack of an accurate database on PwDs (education, experience, type of disability). Some interlocutors (from ProReha) cited insufficient involvement of all key institutions in this area (education, employment, rehabilitation, providers of employment programmes) as the reason for the above. As pointed out, PwDs are engaged in employment and progress has been made, but cooperation among institutions is needed for full inclusion of PwDs in the labour market.

In RS, as stated in the Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Disabled Persons, ‘an employer who employs a disabled person is entitled to tax benefits determined in tax regulations, the right to a financial incentive and to the incentive stipulated in the special contract on the employment of disabled persons’ (Art. 44). In the FBiH, in addition to tax benefits, employers can exercise their right to the incentive stipulated in the contract on the employment of PwDs.

Services that support the employment of PwDs are provided by the Funds through incentives for self-employment, reimbursement of contributions and support for associations of PwDs. Public

employment services, including the Employment Institute of the Republika Srpska, complement this by linking employers with registered jobseekers with disabilities, informing employers about available labour market measures and supporting the implementation of employment and self-employment programmes.

Non-governmental organisations also provide recruitment and advocacy services. In this regard, it is important to mention that the NGO, UDAS is an organisation that provides various types of support, including project employment, for persons with landmine-related injuries (8 243 PwDs), but also from other categories. This organisation mainly works on providing incentives for self-employment e.g. incentives are given for the establishment of small agricultural businesses, and this is the basic way of providing support to unemployed people who have suffered from landmines, but also to those, as the president of the organisation points out, 'whom they come across when visiting the terrain, and who have been disabled in some other way.'

In addition, IC Lotos, the founder of the company for the employment of PwDs known as 'INTRAG', currently employs seven persons with different types of disabilities (one person with a hearing impairment, one person with a moderate intellectual disability, and other persons with physical disabilities; four of whom are also co-employed by the Lotos Centre).

The NGO People in Need also employed 19 PwDs during the project period, more than half of whom are still in employment.

ProReha, which is the founder of Greens, also employs five PwDs. As the interlocutor from ProReha also said, 'Greens received an award for self-sustainable development, and accordingly, as the company expands, the number of employed PwDs will increase.'

5. The linkages between employment and other policy areas

5.1 From school to the labour market

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, children with developmental disabilities are often educated in special institutions, according to special and adapted programmes. So far, framework laws on education and several strategies related to the policy of inclusive education have been adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Education workshops are offered as a type of educational and creative activities aimed at strengthening or acquiring social skills for certain categories (e.g. children with intellectual disabilities and combined disabilities). However, this type of education activity is mainly delivered through the non-governmental sector which operates on a project basis and is most often financed for a period of one year.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, connection between schools and the labour market remains a challenge which is why children with disabilities are educated for professions that are not competitive. According to several interlocutors, limited consideration is also given to the abilities and wishes of the disabled person.

It is evident that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a need to work on awareness raising and mentality change of the wider community, but also of family members of PwDs. For example, the NGO ProReha organised discussions with parents of children with developmental disabilities who are graduating from special secondary schools and offered them participation in certain projects, but the response was not sufficient. However, as the President of ProReha says, 'parents are overly protective of children, and the distance from organisations that operate mainly in larger urban centres has resulted in a low response rate'. 'First of all we need to work with parents to show them that their child with developmental disabilities can contribute to the community.'

As stated in disability policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2008:10), which is still relevant, 'existing regulations unequivocally emphasise the right of every child to upbringing and education under equal conditions. Difficulties faced by children and young PwDs in exercising this right, there are poor spatial and material conditions, architectural-urban planning and informational barriers, uneven distribution of the network of institutions, insufficiently trained professional staff, prejudices, as well as maladjusted textbooks, literature and didactic aids. A developed system of special education schools with a limited number of children and youth with disabilities trained is in place but the status of these institutions is not clear and, in most cases, these schools do not have appropriate conditions to provide adequate education. Educational institutions in most cases do not allocate the funds necessary to implement programmes of inclusive education for children and youth with disabilities. Training of educational staff does not incorporate courses which would prepare them for work with children and youth with disabilities.' Therefore, inaccessible and inappropriate professional training excludes the majority of PwDs and poses either a limiting factor in their development and their training for living and work or a complete obstacle to it.

5.2 Skills development opportunities

As we learned from one of the interlocutors (ProReha), vocational rehabilitation is mainly offered through individual non-governmental organisations. It was also emphasised in the conversation that after the adoption of amendments to the Federal Law on Vocational Rehabilitation, activities in the field of vocational rehabilitation will be organised in a way that is in line with the new law.

In the RS, although a service has already been established, activity planning is still under way.

Vocational rehabilitation is crucial for PwDs, and further efforts are needed to expand practical implementation.

5.3 How social benefits support the employment of persons with disabilities

According to Bosnia and Herzegovina legislation, disability allowance is a right for war-disabled persons with 20% disability, civilian victims of war with 60% disability, and persons with 90% disability having acquired disability in peacetime. This is a right which can be exercised by those in the abovementioned categories, regardless of whether they are in employment.

In the FBiH, the amount of monthly cash benefits for the beneficiaries of veteran-disability protection in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the year 2024 (disability benefit) was KM 962/EUR 495.10. The base for calculating monetary benefits for civilian victims of war is 70% of the base established by federal regulations on the rights of veterans and their family members.

On the other hand, in the RS, disability benefits for civilian victims of war amount to 655 KM/337.10 EUR, and for war disabled military persons KM 874/EUR 449.81.

Some categories of individuals may also avail of other rights which, within the Federation, depend on the financial capacity of the cantons. As the representative of ProReha indicates, 'there are 120 different social benefits in Sarajevo Canton alone. They should exist and should not be abolished at least one year after a person joins the labour market, but later only disability benefits should remain in addition to the salary that the person earns. All the excess giving can make a person passive.'

The fact that certain services can negatively affect active jobseekers was also pointed out by other interlocutors, but some (namely, the representative of the BD Health Department) also stated that the person should be given the opportunity to choose whether to be registered as an active jobseeker or to decide on exercising other rights.

6. ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, social protection is provided depending on the degree of disability and the needs of PwDs. The Law on Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children of the FBiH, the Law on Social Protection of the RS and the Law on Social Protection of Brčko District are laws that regulate social protection rights.

PwDs constitute one of the categories of persons who exercise rights based on the aforementioned laws. The rights promulgated by these laws are rights to: monetary and other material assistance; training for life and work is achieved by children with disabilities in psychophysical development and adults with reduced psychophysical abilities, regardless of the cause of the disability; placement in another family; placement in social welfare institutions; services of social and other professional work; home care and help in the house.

Monetary and other material aid consists of:

1. permanent financial assistance is available to persons and families under the conditions that they are unable to work, that is, they are prevented from exercising their right to work;
2. monetary benefits for help and care from another person can be obtained by PwDs and other persons hindered in physical or mental development, as well as old and infirm persons who, due to permanent changes in their state of health, are in great need of help and care from another person to meet their basic life needs;
3. other material assistance represents one-time and other monetary assistance or in-kind giving to materially uninsured persons or families who are in a state of social need due to difficulties caused by circumstances;

Transportation is not regulated under these laws, but public transportation for PwDs has been in the spotlight in recent years. In this sense, positive examples include larger urban centres such as Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Tuzla. In these cities, transport infrastructure has adapted to certain categories of PwDs (installation of sound signalling; adapted entrances). However, despite ongoing efforts, no major developments have been made in this field in the wider area of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From transport services perspective, there is a slightly higher inclusion of PwDs in larger urban areas. As an example of good practice, we can cite specialised taxi transportation for PwDs in the city of Sarajevo, which was introduced less than three years ago (two vehicles are available).

For all categories of users of social services, centres for social work are key players in the network of social protection institutions. According to entity social protection laws (Law on Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children FBiH Article 48; Law on Social Protection RS Article 81; Law on Social Protection of Brčko District Article 77) these are social protection institutions that provide direct social protection services to all categories, including PwDs, but also, through which the abovementioned social protection rights are exercised.

Accessibility

Accessibility for PwDs is something that has been in the focus of interest for several years in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but no particular progress has been made in this regard. Accessibility in Bosnia and Herzegovina is reduced to the introduction of sound-signalling traffic lights and crossings on sidewalks (which often do not meet the expected standards for certain PwDs). However, since some interlocutors mentioned that certain categories cannot participate in the life of the community without a personal assistant (e.g. the visually impaired), the question arises as to the expediency of introducing temporary guides.

The importance of this topic stems from the fact that Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina conducted an analysis of accessibility in 15 local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The representatives of that organisation are currently working on training public officials on accessibility. They also analyse

buildings, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, as pointed out ‘Simply, briefly and clearly, Bosnia and Herzegovina has not fulfilled its obligations regarding the ratification of the Convention. Accessibility, with a few exceptions, is at a catastrophic level.’ There are no accessible hotels, no accessible information PwDs, nor any accessible literature for PwDs, etc.

7. THE GENDER DIMENSION OF POLICIES SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as far as employment is concerned, and according to the views of a number of interlocutors, women with disabilities do not face additional challenges due to gender and disability.

As some co-workers point out in an interview (BD Employment Office) 'in general, the position of women, and also women with disabilities, depends on the person.'

However, as a practical example, out of a total of 15 PwDs who are employed through the 'My job' project, only 2 are women. In the context of disability support, women with disabilities are exemplary models of good practice in utilising the benefits of the Fund RS, whereas men are the most frequent users of its services.

In this regard, it should be mentioned that the employment institutes at entity level keep continuous records by categories of unemployed persons. According to available information in FBiH, from the beginning of 2024, there were about 5 000 non-war disabled persons on record, of whom approximately 1 530 were women with disabilities. There were also approximately 2 700 disabled war veterans on record, of whom 65 were women. In the case of the Republika Srpska, according to data from the Employment Institute of the RS, 1 119 PwDs were recorded in the unemployment register in 2024. Gender-disaggregated data for this category should be verified with the Institute and, where available, included in future updates of the note. According to cumulative data on unemployed women, 11 636 women with secondary education and 8 women with specialist education were registered.

Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina interlocutors stated that 'there is essentially no difference between men and women, but that the number of leadership positions held by men is still dominant in associations and institutions.' While IC Lotos) representatives pointed out the difficult position of women with disabilities in society in general, and therefore also on the labour market.

The number of registered persons with disabilities is not available for Brčko District; however, given that the full implementation of the Law on Vocational Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities is expected by the end of 2026, it is anticipated that an adequate database on persons with disabilities will be established, or at least on those who are or may become beneficiaries of measures targeting individuals directly or employers.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Conclusions

The employment of persons with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina is supported by a complex and multi-level institutional framework, reflecting the constitutional structure of the country and the division of responsibilities between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska and Brčko District. The entity-level Funds for professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities represent the main dedicated financing and incentive framework for supporting employment, self-employment, professional rehabilitation and employer support. At the same time, public employment services, including the Employment Institute of the Republika Srpska, the Federal Employment Institute and the Employment Office of Brčko District, play an important role through the registration of unemployed persons, labour market intermediation, implementation of broader active labour market measures and cooperation with employers. The system should therefore be understood as a complementary framework involving both specialised disability-employment institutions and mainstream employment services.

A key finding is that employment support for persons with disabilities remains fragmented. Different institutions hold different mandates, databases and instruments, while cooperation often depends on specific projects, institutional initiative or personal contacts. This limits the development of integrated service pathways for persons with disabilities. The effective inclusion of persons with disabilities in employment requires stronger coordination between public employment services, Funds for professional rehabilitation and employment, social welfare centres, education and training providers, rehabilitation services, municipalities, employers, organisations of persons with disabilities and NGOs. Such coordination is particularly important at local level, where persons with disabilities interact with services and where employers make recruitment decisions.

Despite the existence of legal and financial instruments, services supporting employability remain underdeveloped. Professional rehabilitation is recognised by stakeholders as crucial for employment, but it is not provided systematically or continuously. Job counselling tailored to persons with disabilities is weak or absent, and outreach to inactive persons with disabilities remains limited. As a result, support still relies heavily on financial incentives and project-based interventions, while individualised counselling, case management, referral, job coaching and post-placement support are insufficiently developed.

The role of public employment services needs to be strengthened in two directions. First, persons with disabilities should be better included in mainstream employment services and active labour market measures. This requires PES staff to have a better understanding of the needs, skills, barriers and employment potential of persons with disabilities. Second, mainstreaming should be complemented by specialised support for groups with specific needs, such as deaf persons, visually impaired persons, persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities and persons with multiple disabilities. These services could be developed through specialised units within PES or outsourced to qualified providers, including NGOs, rehabilitation providers and organisations of persons with disabilities.

The demand side of employment remains a major bottleneck. Many employers are still reluctant to employ persons with disabilities due to prejudice, lack of information, uncertainty about workplace adaptation and insufficient understanding of reasonable accommodation. Financial incentives are important, but they are unlikely to be sufficient unless employers also receive practical advice, support with recruitment, guidance on job adaptation and follow-up support after hiring. The employment system therefore needs stronger employer-facing services, including proactive employer outreach,

identification of suitable vacancies, support with matching and practical advice on reasonable accommodation.

The lack of comprehensive, interoperable and disaggregated data remains one of the most important systemic weaknesses. Existing institutions maintain their own records, but there is no unified system that would provide a comprehensive picture of persons with disabilities, their labour market status, participation in measures and employment outcomes. Data should allow for basic disaggregation by sex, age, education level, place of residence, type and level of disability, participation in services and measures, and results of interventions. Better data is also necessary for future evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of active labour market policies and measures on employment outcomes.

The link between employment policy and other policy areas remains critical. Barriers in education, transport, accessibility, social protection and social services directly affect the labour market participation of persons with disabilities. Accessibility remains uneven, and many persons with disabilities continue to face physical, informational and transport-related barriers. In addition, differences in rights and benefits according to the cause of disability and place of residence create unequal access to support. Employment policy therefore cannot be effective if it is not linked to broader reforms in accessibility, social protection, education and community-based support services.

The situation of women with disabilities requires stronger attention. Available evidence suggests that gender is not yet systematically integrated into the design, monitoring and evaluation of employment measures for persons with disabilities. Sex-disaggregated data is not consistently available, and the participation of women with disabilities in employment support, self-employment support, professional rehabilitation and leadership positions should be monitored more closely. A gender-sensitive approach is needed to identify whether women with disabilities face specific barriers linked to education, care responsibilities, rural location, type of disability or social norms.

Overall, Bosnia and Herzegovina has established important legal, institutional and financial foundations for supporting the employment of persons with disabilities. However, the next phase of reform should focus less on the existence of instruments and more on their effectiveness, accessibility and results. This means developing individualised services, improving coordination at local level, strengthening PES capacity, supporting employers more actively, improving data systems and evaluating whether measures lead to sustainable employment, job retention and improved economic autonomy for persons with disabilities.

8.2 Best practices

Several good practices and promising approaches can be identified in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While many of them require further consolidation, they provide a useful basis for strengthening future policies and services.

The existence of entity-level Funds for professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities provides a dedicated institutional and financial framework for supporting employment. The Funds finance incentives for employment and self-employment, support employers and contribute to the development of professional rehabilitation and specialised employment measures. This dedicated financing mechanism is an important foundation, particularly in a context where persons with disabilities face multiple barriers to labour market entry and retention.

The cooperation between public authorities, Funds and non-governmental organisations is a positive feature of the system. Interviewed actors highlighted the importance of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental actors, and NGOs are active in advocacy, project implementation, employment support and social enterprise initiatives. This cooperation is particularly relevant because NGOs and organisations of persons with disabilities often have direct knowledge of

the needs of specific groups and can provide specialised support that public institutions may not yet be able to deliver systematically.

The involvement of organisations of persons with disabilities and NGOs in policy processes and project implementation is a valuable practice. Organisations such as ProReha, IC Lotos, People in Need, UDAS, Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina and other civil society actors provide advocacy, practical support, employment opportunities, self-employment support and awareness raising. These initiatives demonstrate that labour market inclusion can be supported not only through public programmes, but also through community-based and specialised approaches.

Social enterprise and NGO-led employment initiatives represent useful examples of practical inclusion. The note refers to organisations and initiatives that employ persons with disabilities directly or support their self-employment, including social enterprise-type models and project-based employment support. These examples are important because they show how adapted workplaces, targeted support and close cooperation with persons with disabilities can help bridge the gap between formal rights and actual employment opportunities.

Administrative records maintained by employment services provide a basis for more targeted activation and monitoring. Employment offices at entity and district level keep records of unemployed persons, including persons with disabilities, although the quality and completeness of data should be further strengthened. These records are a necessary starting point for profiling, case management, referral to appropriate services, monitoring of participation in ALMPs and evaluation of employment outcomes.

The establishment of the Professional Rehabilitation Service within the RS Fund is a promising development. It responds to the recognised gap in the practical implementation of professional rehabilitation and could become an important mechanism for improving the quality of support, provided that it is adequately resourced, linked with public employment services, and connected to employer outreach and workplace-based support.

The existence of quota systems and financial incentives in both entities provides a legal and financial basis for stimulating employer demand. Although implementation challenges remain, the quota and incentive systems create an institutional entry point for engaging employers, promoting reasonable accommodation and strengthening employer accountability. Their impact could be increased if financial incentives were combined with advisory services, workplace adaptation support and systematic follow-up with employers.

The adoption of the Law on Vocational Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Brčko District represents a positive institutional development. Its implementation offers an opportunity to establish administrative records, financing mechanisms, referral procedures and links between employment services, employers and support providers from the outset. This could help Brčko District avoid some of the fragmentation observed elsewhere and develop a more integrated model of support.

8.3 Recommendations

1. Strengthen governance, local coordination, case management and data systems

The employment inclusion of persons with disabilities requires stronger coordination between institutions and service providers, particularly at the local level. Employment institutes, Funds for professional rehabilitation and employment, social welfare centres, education and training providers, health and rehabilitation services, municipalities, employers and NGOs should work through more structured referral and cooperation mechanisms.

A more integrated service pathway should be developed for persons with disabilities, linking registration, assessment of needs, individualised counselling, referral to services, professional rehabilitation, training, job matching, workplace adaptation and post-placement follow-up. This

requires increasing the capacity of public employment services and other relevant providers for **case management and referral**, so that support is not fragmented or limited to one-off measures.

Services for persons with disabilities should be **individualised** and based on the person's education, skills, work experience, type and level of disability, support needs, career interests, family and social situation, place of living, and preferred work arrangements. Individual employment plans could be used to connect persons with disabilities to the most appropriate mainstream or specialised measures.

Administrative data systems should also be strengthened. Data should allow for basic disaggregation, including by sex, age, education level, place of residence, type and level of disability, labour market status, participation in measures, and employment outcomes. Monitoring should place a much stronger focus on the **results of interventions**, including job placement, job retention, quality of employment, sustainability of self-employment and employer take-up of support measures.

Data systems should also be designed with future evaluation needs in mind. In particular, they should make it possible to assess the impact of active labour market policies and measures on the employment outcomes of persons with disabilities.

2. Strengthen the capacity of public employment services and develop specialised support

Public employment services should be strengthened to include persons with disabilities more effectively in mainstream employment services and active labour market measures. This requires better understanding of the needs, capacities and labour market situation of persons with disabilities among PES staff, as well as adapted counselling tools, individual employment planning, employer mediation and follow-up support.

At the same time, mainstreaming should not mean that all persons with disabilities receive the same type of service. There is also a need to develop **specialised services** adjusted to the specific needs of different groups, for example deaf persons, visually impaired persons, persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, and persons with multiple disabilities.

Such specialised support could be provided through dedicated units or specialised counsellors within public employment services, or through outsourcing to qualified NGOs, rehabilitation providers, disability organisations or other specialised service providers. In both cases, clear quality standards, referral procedures and monitoring arrangements should be established.

Professional rehabilitation should be made more systematic and continuous. It should include assessment of abilities and support needs, vocational guidance, skills development, preparation for work, job coaching and cooperation with employers. This would help move from ad hoc or project-based support towards a more stable service offer for persons with disabilities.

3. Strengthen employer-facing services and support for workplace inclusion

Employment services should more actively approach employers and provide practical support for the recruitment, employment and retention of persons with disabilities. This should go beyond general awareness raising and include direct, operational assistance to employers.

Public employment services, in cooperation with the Funds and other relevant actors, should provide employers with information on available incentives, support in identifying suitable candidates, advice on job design, and guidance on workplace adaptation. Particular attention should be given to practical advice on **reasonable accommodation**, including adaptation of workstations, working time, tasks, communication methods, assistive technologies and support arrangements.

Employer-facing services should include proactive outreach to companies, sector-based employer engagement, identification of vacancies suitable for persons with disabilities, support during recruitment, and follow-up after placement. Employers should have a clear contact point that can advise them before and after hiring a person with a disability.

Financial incentives should be better linked with advisory support. Subsidies alone are unlikely to change employer behaviour unless employers also receive practical guidance, assistance with accommodation, and reassurance that support is available if difficulties arise after recruitment.

4. Improve accessibility, rights and the interaction between employment and social protection

Further investment is needed in accessibility, including transport, public institutions, employment offices, training centres and workplaces. Accessibility should be treated as a precondition for labour market participation, not as a separate infrastructure issue.

The system of social benefits should be reviewed to ensure that it does not discourage labour market participation. Persons with disabilities should be able to combine employment income with necessary disability-related support, especially during transition into employment. Any reform should protect income security while reducing disincentives to work.

Rights and support should be more equal across entities and Brčko District, and should not depend excessively on the cause of disability or place of residence. Further harmonisation of terminology, eligibility rules and access to services would support a more rights-based and inclusive approach.

5. Strengthen gender-sensitive monitoring and support

All measures supporting the employment of persons with disabilities should be monitored by sex and, where possible, by age, education, type and level of disability, place of residence and type of intervention. This would make it possible to assess whether women with disabilities have equal access to employment services, professional rehabilitation, subsidies, self-employment support and other active labour market measures.

Additional attention should be paid to women with disabilities who face multiple barriers, including those living in rural areas, women with low levels of education, and women with higher support needs. Gender-sensitive monitoring should be used not only for reporting, but also for adjusting programme design and outreach.

6. Support implementation and evaluation of reforms

Brčko District should be supported in implementing its Law on Vocational Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, including through the establishment of administrative records, institutional procedures, financing mechanisms and links with employment services, employers and social services.

More broadly, regular evaluation of employment and professional rehabilitation measures for persons with disabilities should be introduced. Evaluation should assess not only the number of incentives awarded or persons participating in programmes, but also employment outcomes, retention, quality of jobs, sustainability of self-employment, employer satisfaction and cost-effectiveness. This evidence should be used to improve the design of future active labour market policies and measures.

ANNEX

List of interviewed institutions and organisations

- Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Department for Development and Preparation of Programmes and Incentives
- Fund for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities of Republika Srpska
- Department of Health and Other Affairs of Brčko District
- Employment Office of Brčko District
- Employment Institute of Republika Srpska
- Federal Employment Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina
- IC Lotos
- NGO My right
- NGO People in Need
- NGO ProReha
- NGO Udas

ACRONYMS

ALMM	Active labour market measures
ALMP	Active labour market policy
EAA	European Accessibility Act
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GAP III	Gender Action Plan 2021-2025
IBHI	Institute for Social and Health Policies
IT	Information technology
MSs	Member States
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OPD	Organisation for Persons with Disabilities
PC(s)	Partner Country / Partner Countries (of the European Training Foundation)
PES	Public Employment Services
UDAS	Udruženje Amputiraca (Association of Amputees)
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
YAP	Youth Action Plan

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