

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

Country note

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Manuscript completed in February 2026.

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When citing this report, please use the following wording:

European Training Foundation (2026), *Labour market (re)integration and skills development for persons with disabilities – Armenia*, Turin

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PREFACE

The Country Note presents the situation in Armenia regarding labour market (re-)integration and skills development for persons with disabilities, with specific reference to the role of active labour market policies and measures.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) has 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 of fostering the social inclusion and economic autonomy of persons with disabilities through employment, in line with the priorities set out in the EU Disability Employment Package.

The main objectives were to conduct a systemic, comparative policy analysis of employment support for 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.

In Armenia, the methodology consisted of a desk review and face-to-face and online interviews with key stakeholders active in employment promotion and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The detailed list of interviewed institutions and organisations is available in Annex.

1 CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

1.1 Context

Armenia is a small, landlocked country in the South Caucasus with a permanent population of 2.9 million according to the 2022 Population Census (RA Statistical Committee, 2024). The state is a parliamentary democracy. Services account for over half of GDP, followed by industry and agriculture (Enterprise Armenia, 2025).

In 2023, Armenia's working-age population (aged 15 years and above) amounted to 2.4 million persons, of whom 1.35 million were in the labour force. The labour force participation rate was 56.4%, the employment rate 49.4%, and the unemployment rate 12.2%. Gender gaps remained significant: men's participation was 68.4% compared with 44.1% for women, with corresponding employment rates of 60.4% and 40%. Rural areas showed slightly higher participation (60.4%) than urban areas (54.2%), but rural employment was dominated by informal agricultural work.

Young persons are particularly disadvantaged. Among those aged 15–29, the unemployment rate reached 21.2% in 2023, almost double the national average. Overall, 43.6% of the working-age population remained outside the labour force, including students (15%), homemakers (26%), and pensioners (41%). Informality remains widespread, affecting one in three employed persons (RA Statistical Committee, 2024).

Armenia also faces governance challenges. While laws and strategic documents are in place, implementation and enforcement often fall short, leading to a persistent gap between formal commitments and practice in areas such as employment, social protection and accessibility (OECD, 2019).

Security risks remain an important external factor (Armenian Foreign Intelligence Service, 2025). The recent conflict with Azerbaijan and the displacement of more than 100 000 people from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 have increased economic and social pressures (Freedom House, 2024). These risks contribute to uncertainty, discourage investment and exacerbate existing labour market vulnerabilities, particularly for disadvantaged groups.

Overall, Armenia's labour market is shaped by demographic decline (RA Statistical Committee, 2024), gender and youth disparities, high informality, weak enforcement of policies, and the impact of regional security risks. These factors form the broader context for analysing the employment situation of persons with disabilities.

1.2 Situation of persons with disabilities

The analysis in this section draws on multiple data sources. Administrative records are maintained by the Unified Social Service (USS) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and are also published by the Armenian Statistical Committee. They cover all individuals formally registered with disability status under Armenia's new ICF-based assessment system and the previous socio-medical examination model. These records include only persons who have undergone an official assessment and therefore do not capture individuals with functional difficulties who are not registered as 'persons with disabilities'. Consequently, the picture may differ considerably if disability is understood more broadly, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), as a social construct shaped by interaction with barriers. Labour market indicators are derived from the Labour Force Survey conducted by the Armenian Statistical Committee, which provides representative data for the population aged 15 years and above, including disability-disaggregated information based on self-reporting. Population statistics originate from the 2022 Census, which applied the Washington

Group methodology on functional difficulties. Each of these sources uses different definitions and coverage, meaning that the figures are not directly comparable but together provide a comprehensive overview of the situation of persons with disabilities in Armenia.

Administrative records indicate that, in the first half of 2025, there were 188 234 adults with disabilities registered in the country, representing around 6.4% of the total population. Of these, 48.3% were women. Among adults registered with disabilities, 10.8% were aged 18 to 39 and 33.2% were between 40 and the statutory pension age. Women represented 31.4% of younger adults and 42.4% of those aged 40 to pension age. About one third (32.1%) of all persons registered with disabilities resided in Yerevan, reflecting the concentration of both the general population and disability registrations in the capital (RA Statistical Committee, 2025).

The 2022 census introduced questions on functional difficulties based on the Washington Group methodology. The results have not yet been analysed and therefore general disability figures could not be provided. The published data are limited to prevalence by functional domain (RA Statistical Committee, 2024). According to these results, the share of the population reporting 'a lot of difficulty' or 'cannot do at all' was as follows:

- seeing, even if wearing glasses: 2.0%,
- hearing, even if using a hearing aid: 1.1%,
- walking or climbing stairs: 2.5%,
- remembering or concentrating: 1.0%,
- washing, bathing, or dressing: 0.8%,
- communicating, understanding or being understood in the same language: 0.6%.

It should be noted that Armenia recently reformed its disability assessment system, adopting the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework (Republic of Armenia, 2021). As a result, administrative statistics are now structured under the new system, and it is no longer possible to produce fully comparable time-series data on the types of disabilities across different reporting periods.

According to the 2023 Labour Force Survey, the total working-age population with disabilities aged 15 years and above comprised around 190 000 persons. Men accounted for 53.1% of this population and were therefore overrepresented compared with persons without disabilities, among whom men accounted for 45%.

The labour force participation rate for persons with disabilities was 22.7%, compared to 59% among persons without disabilities. The employment-to-population ratio stood at 20.6% for individuals with disabilities, while it was 51.9% for those without disabilities. The unemployment rate was 9.5% for persons with disabilities and 12.5% for persons without disabilities. It is important to note that the lower unemployment rate observed among persons with disabilities should not be considered positive, as it primarily reflects their reduced levels of economic activity.

There were marked disparities by sex and place of residence. The labour force participation rate was 27.6% for men with disabilities, compared with 17.2% for women. Similarly, the employment-to-population ratio was 24.9% for men and 15.7% for women. In urban areas, the labour force participation rate was 19.8%, with an employment-to-population ratio of 17.2% and an unemployment rate of 13.0%.

The majority of working-age persons with disabilities were outside the labour force. In 2023, 77.2% of persons with disabilities were not economically active. Among them, the largest shares were pensioners or persons classified with disability status (80.7%), other jobless persons (11.8%), housekeepers (6.1%) and full-time students (1.3%). When asked why they were not seeking work, 67.4% cited illness or disability and 26.6% reported being discouraged or hopeless about finding a job, while smaller shares pointed to family circumstances (1.7%), studying (1.1%) and other reasons (3.2%).

Taken together, these figures highlight the persistent exclusion of persons with disabilities from Armenia's labour market. Compared with the general population, whose labour force participation rate stood at 56.4% and whose employment-to-population ratio was 49.4%, persons with disabilities were more than twice as likely to be outside the labour force. While their recorded unemployment rate (9.5%) is slightly lower than the national average (12.2%), this reflects a non-inclusive labour market in which the majority of persons with disabilities are economically inactive.

The structure of employment among persons with disabilities also reflects vulnerability. Of the employed persons with disabilities, 53.8% were employees and 44.9% were self-employed. In terms of job permanency, 76.5% held permanent jobs while 20.7% were in temporary or seasonal positions and 1.5% were in occasional work. By contrast, in the general population aged 15 years and above, 83.4% of employed persons held permanent jobs, 16.0% had temporary or seasonal work, and 0.6% had occasional work, indicating higher employment insecurity among persons with disabilities. In terms of working time, 24.2% of employed persons with disabilities worked part-time and 59.7% worked full-time (RA Statistical Committee, 2024).

Working-time patterns also reveal significant differences. Among employed persons with disabilities, 24.2% worked part-time, 59.7% full-time and 14.8% reported excessive working hours, compared with 16.1%, 66.8% and 17.1%, respectively, in the general population. These patterns suggest that persons with disabilities are more likely to experience reduced working hours and less stable employment conditions, further contributing to income disparities and limited career advancement (RA Statistical Committee, 2024).

The 2023 LFS further indicates that persons with disabilities in rural areas participate in the labour force at higher rates than those in urban areas (29.5% versus 19.8%). Their employment-to-population ratio was similarly higher in rural areas (28.4%) than in urban areas (17.2%). Much of this rural employment is linked to agriculture, often through self-employment or informal family farming, making agriculture one of the few sectors in which persons with disabilities are visibly engaged in economic activity.

The 2023 LFS indicates a strong correlation between employment outcomes and educational attainment. The labour force participation rate was highest among individuals with tertiary education (31%), followed by those with specialised secondary vocational education (26%) and general secondary education (22%); it was only 7% among individuals with general basic or lower educational qualifications. Employment rates reflected similar trends, at 29%, 23%, 19% and 7%, respectively. The data highlight that individuals with the lowest educational levels faced significant exclusion from the labour market, with 93% remaining outside it.

Compared to people without disabilities, labour force participation rates were 73% for those with higher education, 62% for individuals with secondary specialised vocational education, 56% for those with general secondary education and 23% among people with general basic or lower educational qualifications. The corresponding employment rates were 65%, 54%, 48%, and 18%. These figures indicate that employment barriers exist across all levels of education. While higher educational attainment does improve job prospects, other structural barriers continue to substantially limit opportunities in the labour market (RA Statistical Committee, 2024).

Administrative records from the Unified Social Service provide additional insight. Of 36 654 registered unemployed persons in June 2025, only 1 504 were persons with disabilities, representing 4.1% of all registered unemployed people (RA Statistical Committee, 2025). Of these, 988 were men (6.8% of all registered unemployed men) and 516 were women (2.3% of all registered unemployed women). The number of unemployed persons with disabilities declined from 1 784 in the first half of 2024 to 1 509 in the same period of 2025 (a reduction of about 15%). No official explanation for this decline has been provided, and it is therefore unclear whether it reflects improved employment outcomes, administrative changes affecting registration or other factors. Nevertheless, employment outcomes remain limited. From January to June 2025, only 45 unemployed persons with disabilities were placed in jobs, compared with 80 in the same period in 2024, reflecting a 44% year-on-year decrease.

In June 2025, the total number of registered jobseekers¹ in Armenia was 55 052, of whom 1 504 were persons with disabilities (2.7%). Of these, 516 were women and 988 were men. The share of persons with disabilities in this group remains below their estimated proportion in the working-age population (6.4%), indicating barriers to access and participation in state employment services (RA Statistical Committee, 2025). Women with disabilities are particularly underrepresented, most likely due to lower participation and visibility in the labour market. The very low and declining number of job placements highlights the limited effectiveness of existing employment support measures.

The AWDA Mapping Study (2022) examined barriers and opportunities affecting the employment of persons with disabilities across Armenia's regions. It combined employer surveys, focus group discussions and interviews with persons with disabilities and employment service representatives to assess perceptions, accessibility and inclusion within key economic sectors. More than half of the employers surveyed in these sectors stated that persons with disabilities could not realise their potential in the industry. This stands in sharp contrast to the statistical data, which show that agriculture accounts for a substantial share of the work available to persons with disabilities. This contradiction underscores the paradox: agriculture is both the sector in which many persons with disabilities actually work and the sector in which some of the most negative employer perceptions are found.

There is no consistent national dataset on the wages and earnings of persons with disabilities, informal employment or access to reskilling programmes. Employer-level data on hiring practices are scarce and limited to ad hoc studies. Furthermore, there is a lack of longitudinal or panel data to track labour market transitions for persons with disabilities over time. However, the Armenian Statistical Committee publishes relatively detailed disability-disaggregated data through the Labour Force Survey, which is uncommon in the region and represents a national strength in terms of data availability and transparency.

¹ According to the Law on Employment, jobseekers are individuals aged 16 and above who have applied to the Unified Social Service for employment assistance, while registered unemployed are those among them who are not engaged in any form of employment and have officially received unemployed status.

2 STRATEGIC AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Legislative framework

The rights and employment of persons with disabilities in Armenia are regulated by a set of core statutes.

The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Republic of Armenia, 2021) is the principal act aligning national law with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). The law defines disability as arising from the interaction of health conditions and environmental barriers and recognises a person with a disability as someone who may face restrictions on full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. For the purposes of access to services and benefits, however, an individual must be formally recognised as a person with a disability under the Law on Assessment of a Person's Functionality (Republic of Armenia, 2021), through a process in which specialists assess functional limitations and categorise disability based on standardised criteria. Employment and labour relations are also covered by that law, which guarantees accessibility, reasonable accommodation and protection against disability-based discrimination. The law also ensures that organisations of persons with disabilities have the right to apply to the administrative court in cases of discrimination.

The Labour Code of the Republic of Armenia (Republic of Armenia, 2004) regulates general labour relations and includes specific protections for persons with disabilities, prohibiting discrimination against them in employment, affording them the right to request reasonable accommodation or transfer to another suitable position, and obliging employers to ensure their occupational health and safety. It also includes provisions granting them preferential rights in cases of redundancy and regulates working time for workers with disabilities, based on medical assessments.

The Law on Employment (Republic of Armenia, 2013) regulates the public employment service and the system of active labour market programmes. It defines employment as wage labour but also includes work under civil contracts, self-employment, mandatory military service and participation in formal education or vocational training. This broad definition determines eligibility for state employment programmes and ensures that diverse forms of engagement in work or learning are recognised within the employment policy framework.

Persons with disabilities are included in the broader category of 'uncompetitive persons' in the labour market that also covers other disadvantaged groups. **This categorisation gives them priority access to certain measures** including vocational training, wage subsidies, and self-employment support. The law also provides the statutory basis for the **quota system**, requiring public and private employers with more than 100 employees to allocate jobs to persons with disabilities, although this system is not currently operational.

A recent **reform initiative** sought to **introduce a revised employment quota system** for persons with disabilities, in parallel with amendments envisaged under the new Employment Strategy (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, 2025). The proposal, tabled by Ms Zaruhi Batoyan from the Civil Contract parliamentary group, aimed to institutionalise differentiated quota obligations across sectors. It envisaged a 4% quota for public and state-affiliated entities employing 100 or more persons and a 2% quota for private organisations of the same size. The draft also proposed strengthening compliance by extending the minimum period during which a quota-designated position must be filled by a person with a disability from 183 to 275 calendar days.

During committee deliberations, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs signalled conditional support but called for further technical adjustments and postponement of entry into force until 2027, indicating concerns regarding implementation readiness. Although the author agreed to revise the draft accordingly, the initiative did not advance to plenary consideration. Opposition from members of the ruling party resulted in a political deadlock, effectively halting the reform. The episode illustrates the

limited political consensus around the use of mandatory quotas as a policy instrument and highlights the fragility of reform efforts that lack clear intra-party backing, even when formally aligned with broader strategic objectives.

Other relevant laws include the Law on State Benefits (Republic of Armenia, 2013) and the Law on Social Assistance (Republic of Armenia, 2024), which regulate disability pensions and benefits and shape access to social services.

Although Armenia has a comprehensive legal framework regulating disability rights, employment and labour relations, its impact is limited by several important shortcomings.

Firstly, enforcement mechanisms remain inadequate: while the Labour Code and the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021) impose requirements for reasonable accommodation, implementation in practice is limited. The quota system, though officially established, is not functioning. In 2018, the Government revoked the decree governing the implementation and oversight of quotas, resulting in the absence of enforcement mechanisms. Consequently, monitoring does not occur, sanctions are not imposed and compensatory payments are not allocated to inclusive employment initiatives. Employer obligations thus tend to be primarily declarative rather than actionable.

Secondly, there are conceptual and legal inconsistencies: the Law on Employment continues to classify persons with disabilities as ‘uncompetitive’, a concept that contradicts the human rights approach of the CRPD and perpetuates a deficit-based perception of disability. In addition, overlaps between the new disability rights law and older social protection rules create uncertainty in interpretation and application.

Thirdly, the role of non-governmental organisations and organisations of persons with disabilities, although formally recognised in the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is not **meaningfully ensured in practice**. Their participation in employment-related policymaking is limited, and no structured consultation mechanisms exist within labour market governance.

2.2 Strategic framework

Armenia ratified the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** in 2010 and the Optional Protocol in 2022, committing to ensuring equal rights, including in employment (United Nations Treaty Body Database, 2025). The country is also a state party to other international treaties relevant to the right to work and social inclusion, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations Treaty Body Database, 2025) and the European Social Charter (Council of Europe, 2025). These instruments reinforce Armenia’s obligations to guarantee equal opportunities in employment, social protection and vocational training for persons with disabilities.

The Comprehensive Programme for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities 2023–2027 (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2023) is the main national framework on disability inclusion. It sets objectives across seven priority areas, including employment. Regarding employment, the programme includes measures to support self-employment and entrepreneurship, ensure the accessibility of employment programmes, provide reasonable accommodation and strengthen labour inspection. It also establishes annual reporting and monitoring obligations. However, the action plan does not contain measurable employment-related activities, targets or dedicated budget lines, which in practice limits its effectiveness.

The Demographic Strategy 2024–2040 also addresses labour market participation as a factor in demographic sustainability. It prioritises increased employment among youth, women and older persons, improved job quality and regional balance. However, it does not include any references to persons with disabilities or disability-inclusive measures (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2024).

The Employment Strategy of the Republic of Armenia 2025–2031 (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2024) aims to increase overall employment, reduce skills mismatches and activate vulnerable groups such as youth, women and low-income households. Persons with disabilities are recognised as a group facing labour market disadvantages, but the strategy does not set disability-specific objectives, indicators or resources. Disability inclusion is therefore expected to be addressed indirectly through mainstream measures.

A comparison between the current Employment Strategy and its predecessor for 2013–2018 (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2012) reveals a sharp decline in emphasis: the 2013–2018 strategy mentioned persons with disabilities 62 times and included a range of targeted measures, while the new strategy mentions disability only seven times, exclusively in the situation analysis, without integrating disability-specific measures into goals, programmes or expected results.

The Strategy for the Implementation of Gender Policy 2025–2028 (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2025) seeks to promote gender equality in public life, education and the labour market. Although it has potential relevance for women with disabilities, it does not contain any provisions explicitly addressing the intersection of gender, disability and employment.

Taken together, these three strategies provide a framework that is formally comprehensive but fragmented. Disability is recognised as a stand-alone policy area, employment is addressed as a cross-cutting economic and social priority, and gender equality is pursued in a separate document. However, the linkages between them remain weak: the disability programme lacks measurable labour market outcomes, the new employment strategy does not operationalise disability inclusion, and the gender strategy overlooks the specific challenges of women with disabilities.

2.3 Institutional framework

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA) is the lead institution responsible for employment and social protection policy, including the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market. The Ministry develops employment policy and oversees the implementation of state employment programmes through the Unified Social Service (USS), which functions as Armenia's Public Employment Service.

The USS operates a nationwide network of territorial centres covering all marzes (provinces), providing front-line services such as registration of jobseekers, recognition of unemployment status, needs assessment, preparation of individual employment plans, counselling, career guidance and intermediation with employers (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2013). It also delivers state employment programmes, including training, wage subsidies and self-employment support, and organises job fairs.

Local government bodies also have a legal role. According to the Law on Social Assistance, municipalities are responsible for designing and delivering community social programmes in cooperation with the USS territorial centres (Republic of Armenia, 2024). However, no community-level initiatives directly supporting the employment of persons with disabilities were identified. Local authorities are not systematically encouraged to engage in employment-related activities.

Employers are recognised as key partners in state employment policy. They participate in the work of the USS and are formally represented in vocational education and training (VET) governance structures, contributing to the development of training standards and the matching of skills supply with labour-market demand (Republic of Armenia, 2024).

Civil society organisations provide complementary services. In 2025, the NGO Unison implemented a programme funded by Yerevan Municipality aimed at placing persons with disabilities in jobs. Other organisations, such as the Armenian Deaf Society, the Armenian Blind Union and the NGOs Agate and Disability Rights Agenda, also provide counselling, employer sensitisation and advocacy. The Armenian Deaf Society and the Armenian Blind Union are largely self-financed through income generated from renting their premises. The NGO We Can is supported mainly by UMCOR Armenia,

while Agate operates with funding from international donors and Armenian foundations. Disability Rights Agenda is financed by international donors, including the UK, Canada, the EU and other European foundations. However, the scale of NGO-led employment initiatives remains very limited. Interviews with NGOs indicated that their employment initiatives secure, on average, only 5 to 10 jobs per year for persons with disabilities, most of which are short-term or non-permanent positions.

Donors and international partners support a wide range of employment and social protection reforms. The European Union, UNDP, UNICEF and WFP implement programmes on integrated social protection and employment services. The ILO and the World Bank provide technical support on labour market programmes, while gender-focused programmes such as EU4Gender Equality promote women's employment. However, no donor programme has been identified that is specifically designed to increase the employment of persons with disabilities. Disability is either addressed through supplementary components or mentioned among several target groups, without dedicated interventions.

The institutional framework for employment is formally well defined in Armenia, with clear roles for the MLSA, USS, employers, local authorities, NGOs and international partners. The VET system is a relatively strong environment in which state institutions, employers and NGOs cooperate, yet interviews indicate that **cooperation remains limited and involvement is often not meaningful**. One critical weakness is the lack of effective coordination: even different units of the same ministry sometimes implement overlapping initiatives without alignment. Local authorities have formal roles but are not encouraged or resourced to contribute to employment promotion. Data collection and information sharing between institutions is not well regulated, undermining evidence-based policy and accountability.

2.4 Coordination and cooperation mechanisms

Armenia has both formal and informal mechanisms that are intended to facilitate coordination between state institutions, social partners and civil society in the field of employment and disability, but their effectiveness remains limited.

The Labour Code establishes a framework for cooperation between workers, employers and the Government at national, sectoral, territorial and enterprise levels. In principle, this mechanism should ensure that issues such as the employment of persons with disabilities are considered in collective bargaining. In practice, however, the tripartite commission has been largely inactive in recent years (Republican Branch Union of Professional Organisations of the Workers of State Enterprises, Municipal Authorities and Public Service of Armenia, 2025). Nor has disability employment been placed at the centre of its agenda (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2025).

A new Republican Collective Agreement was signed in January 2026 that includes commitments to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and support inclusive entrepreneurship. While this represents a positive policy development, its practical impact will depend on whether the tripartite commission resumes regular functioning and translates these commitments into concrete measures.

The National Commission on Disability Issues, chaired by the Prime Minister, is a tripartite body composed of government representatives, local authorities and organisations of persons with disabilities. It is mandated to review policies and advise on measures across different sectors, including employment. In practice, however, despite this broad mandate, the Commission has been largely inactive in recent years. Meetings take place irregularly, decisions are not followed by concrete actions and, while employment is occasionally mentioned, no specific measures have been developed under its auspices.

In the absence of strong formal coordination platforms, **cooperation often relies on informal practices and personal relations**. Staff in the Unified Social Service, municipalities and civil society organisations frequently use direct contacts to resolve individual cases. While such ad hoc

arrangements can produce short-term solutions, they fail to create institutional memory. Once personnel change or programmes are modified, knowledge is lost and cooperation breaks down.

The challenges that emerge from this system are significant: policymakers are often unfamiliar with the practical realities of service delivery while service providers have little knowledge of the policy framework.

Overall, the coordination architecture in Armenia is more symbolic than functional. Mechanisms exist on paper but fail to generate meaningful cooperation and much depends on individual initiative rather than institutionalised processes. Stronger engagement is needed at all levels so that policymakers are aware of how services are delivered, service providers understand national policy commitments and local actors can play an active role. Internal mechanisms are needed to translate laws and policies into clear guidelines, enabling non-lawyers and frontline staff to apply them consistently. Without such steps, coordination remains fragmented, institutional memory remains weak and employment support for persons with disabilities continues to lack coherence.

2.5 Sources of financing

In Armenia, **there is no dedicated stream of financing for disability employment measures and there are no employment programmes specifically designed for persons with disabilities.**

All active labour market programmes are funded from the state budget and administered through the Unified Social Service. These programmes, such as wage subsidies or support for seasonal employment, are open to the general public. Persons with disabilities may participate, but there are no earmarked resources, tailored activities or budget lines that specifically address their needs, and information on expenditure is not broken down to show disability-related spending.

Regional and local budgets play a role in financing social assistance, but there is no evidence of municipalities supporting employment programmes for persons with disabilities. One exception is Yerevan Municipality, which is funding an employment-related project currently being implemented by the NGO Unison.

The quota system **provided for in the Law on Employment was intended to create an additional source of financing** through compensatory payments from employers who do not meet their quota obligations. These funds were to be used for rehabilitation and employment measures for persons with disabilities. **In practice, the quota system is not operational, monitoring is absent and no compensatory funds are being collected or redistributed.** Consequently, there is no special fund that channels resources into disability employment.

Donor programmes are active in strengthening social protection and employment services in general, and disability inclusion may be mentioned within these initiatives, some of which address the needs of persons with disabilities. However, there is no donor programme dedicated primarily to employment support for persons with disabilities. The ILO implemented a project in 2023–2024 entitled 'Mapping and strengthening community-based care resources for persons with disabilities and long-term support needs', in collaboration with WHO, the European Disability Forum and national partners such as the NGO Disability Rights Agenda.

Another ongoing donor-funded initiative is the 'Leading Equality and Access for Disabilities' project (2024–2027), implemented by World Vision France with partners WVCPAF, Agate, Full Life and Source Foundation. The EUR 1 million EU-funded project supports the rollout of Armenia's new ICF-based disability assessment system and the development of post-assessment services across five regions (Shirak, Lori, Tavush, Gegharkunik and Syunik). While the project does not have employment-specific objectives, its capacity-building component includes structured dialogue between Armenian organisations of persons with disabilities and EU experts on issues related to employment, social protection and poverty reduction, indirectly contributing to inclusive labour market policies.

The absence of dedicated financing instruments for the employment of persons with disabilities results in a lack of disability-specific programmes. General employment programmes therefore do not systematically allocate resources for disability-related measures such as workplace accommodation, supported employment or job coaching, and existing financing mechanisms fail to compensate for this gap. In particular, the quota system, which could potentially generate earmarked resources, is not effectively enforced.

3 POLICIES INCREASING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

3.1 Services aimed at increasing the employability of persons with disabilities

Employment services for jobseekers, including persons with disabilities, are delivered through the Unified Social Service. The USS is required to carry out needs assessments, prepare individual employment programmes and conclude contracts with registered beneficiaries. The regulations also provide for cooperation with non-state providers in delivering employment services, formally extending these entitlements to persons with disabilities.

However, such services remain largely generic in practice. Counselling is not tailored to disability-related needs, there are no case managers or job coaches and reasonable accommodation is not systematically provided.

The lack of disaggregated monitoring data makes it impossible to determine how many persons with disabilities benefit from these services. The available evidence suggests that only a very limited number access counselling or job placement annually. NGOs sometimes provide complementary services, but these are fragmented, donor-funded and not formally integrated into the public system.

As a result, although the legal framework provides for individualised services and recognises persons with disabilities as a priority group, the absence of practical adaptations, reliable monitoring and systematic cooperation severely limits their effectiveness in increasing employability.

3.2 Measures aimed at increasing the employability of persons with disabilities

Supply-side measures provided by the public employment services mainly include vocational training referrals and other employability-enhancing services. These measures are universal in scope and open to all unemployed persons, but none are specifically designed or adapted for persons with disabilities.

Training opportunities frequently lack physical accessibility, curricula are not adjusted to diverse needs and resources are not allocated to ensure reasonable accommodation. Subsidised employment schemes are formally available for 'uncompetitive persons', a category that includes persons with disabilities, yet only a very small number of beneficiaries with disabilities are recorded in practice. In-work rehabilitation and supported employment schemes are absent from the USS portfolio, and integrated approaches combining career guidance, training and subsidised employment are not implemented.

Sometimes, non-governmental organisations run limited projects that bring together counselling, skills training and efforts to raise employer awareness. These initiatives are often temporary, depend on outside donor support and do not continue in the long term. Because there are no dedicated government-led programmes, policies intended to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities face a considerable gap.

Between 2021 and 2022, state employment measures were suspended by the Government with the stated aim of assessing their effectiveness (Zhoghovurd daily, 2022). During this period, no new programmes were introduced to replace those that had been discontinued, creating a policy vacuum. This interruption limited access to active labour market measures for all jobseekers, including

persons with disabilities. No report or assessment on the effectiveness of the suspended programmes has been published to date, leaving the basis and results of this review unknown.

In April 2026, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia submitted for public consultation a draft government decision entitled 'On approving the Employment Assurance Programme for Persons with Disabilities and Persons Aged 63 and Above'.

The draft proposes financial incentives for employers (excluding public-sector bodies and organisations with 50% or more state or community ownership) that conclude full-time employment contracts with persons with disabilities and persons aged 63 and over for a minimum duration of three to six months (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2026). However, organisations of persons with disabilities have highlighted that such programmes do not adequately address structural barriers, including workplace accessibility and the lack of reasonable accommodation and support services necessary for sustainable employment outcomes.

3.3 Services and measures addressing the needs of war veterans

War veterans with disabilities access the same USS services as other jobseekers. The Labour Code provides them with some additional protections, such as priority retention in redundancy situations.

In 2021, the Government of Armenia introduced an initiative to support employers interested in hiring individuals who had acquired disabilities following injury during military operations (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2021). The programme, which ultimately proved unsuccessful, offered income tax deductions based on the employee's salary: up to AMD 100 000 per quarter and a lump sum of up to AMD 500 000 for reasonable accommodation, if required. A total of 463 individuals with disabilities and 375 employers sought counselling with the intention of participating. However, despite this level of interest, the programme ultimately resulted in only one employer hiring a single individual who had acquired a disability following injury during military operations (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2022).

This very low participation stemmed from several design and procedural barriers. The design required both the employer and the worker to be registered with the Unified Social Service, creating a barrier to eligibility. However, both sides preferred less formal channels of recruitment and did not want to register. Consequently, many employers who were interested in the programme already had potential candidates with disabilities who were not officially registered as jobseekers and therefore could not participate. Limited outreach and weak coordination between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and defence structures further constrained implementation, leading to the programme's minimal results.

At present, there are no dedicated state employment measures for war veterans with disabilities. Some NGOs and charitable organisations provide vocational rehabilitation or placement assistance, but these initiatives are fragmented, small in scale and lack stable funding. There are no monitoring data on their effectiveness.

3.4 Enhancing the capacity of main stakeholders

The limitations of supply-side services and measures are closely linked to capacity constraints. USS staff are generalists and lack specialised training in disability inclusion, job coaching or workplace adaptation. Territorial centres often operate with insufficient human resources to provide individualised support. NGOs play a complementary role but operate on a small scale with limited funding and sustainability. Coordination between the USS, NGOs, VET institutions and rehabilitation providers is weak, and there are no systematic mechanisms for capacity-building.

To date, no state-led initiatives have been identified to enhance the capacity of USS staff specifically to work with persons with disabilities. Training programmes on disability inclusion, supported

employment or case management are absent. Similarly, no specialised services such as supported employment units or vocational rehabilitation services have been established within the USS. Donor projects occasionally provide training or pilot new approaches, but these remain ad hoc and have not been institutionalised.

4 Policies supporting demand for the employment of persons with disabilities

Demand-side measures in Armenia are weakly developed. Although several instruments exist in law or policy, their implementation is limited, coverage is low and they have little measurable impact on employer behaviour.

The quota system is the critical measure provided for by legislation. The Law on Employment requires organisations with more than 100 employees to allocate jobs to persons with disabilities: 3% of the workforce in public institutions and 1% in private companies. Employers who do not comply are required to pay compensatory contributions into a special fund, intended to finance rehabilitation and employment support measures. In practice, however, the quota system is not operational. Monitoring is not carried out, compensatory payments are not collected, and no special fund has been created. As a result, the quota system remains purely declarative and does not create incentives for employers to hire persons with disabilities.

Direct financing instruments are available in the form of wage subsidies and, more recently, through a new programme piloted in 2025 in Syunik and Kotayk regions. Under Government Decision No 770-L, ‘fit-to-work’ members of socially vulnerable families can access short-term training and work experience placements, while partial wage compensation is available for employers who provide longer-term contracts. Employers receive up to AMD 250 000 for training costs, AMD 165 000 in monthly wage support, plus tax subsidies, for placements of up to three months and between 50% and 70% of the wage (capped at the minimum wage) for contracts of six months or longer (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2025). While this is the most structured demand-side incentive in recent years, it is not disability-specific. Persons with disabilities may benefit only if they are also classified as members of socially vulnerable families under the national vulnerability assessment system. The programme remains geographically limited, and outcome data are not yet available.

Tax incentives linked to the employment of persons with disabilities formally exist but are limited in scope and weak in impact. The Tax Code permits 150% of wages and related payments made to employees with disabilities to be written off against tax, including in the case of those engaged under civil contracts, when calculating their taxable base for income tax. In practice, this means that if an employer pays AMD 100 000 in wages to persons with disabilities, they may deduct AMD 150 000 from their taxable profit, thereby reducing their overall income tax liability (Republic of Armenia, 2016).

As of 12 September 2025, data from the State Revenue Committee indicate that 699 taxpayers submitted 2024 declarations including the above deductions and a total of AMD 13 975 305 102 was declared. The Committee does not maintain separate administrative records on employees with disabilities, therefore no disaggregated data on their employment are available.

The outreach of the instrument is narrow. It benefits only those employers with sufficient taxable income, thereby excluding many small and medium enterprises operating under simplified tax regimes or low profit margins. The measure does not apply to social contributions or payroll taxes, which represent a larger financial burden for employers. Even though data from the State Revenue Committee confirm some use of the provision, it is not routinely monitored, and awareness of its existence appears low among employers.

As a result, the incentive has not had a measurable effect on hiring practices and remains largely symbolic. Compared to international practice, where tax incentives are designed to be broad-based, simple to administer and closely linked to inclusive hiring or workplace accommodation, Armenia’s approach is highly restrictive and underutilised.

The seasonal employment support programme for rural households promotes short-term hiring in agriculture for landholders of up to three hectares who are classified as ‘uncompetitive’ in the labour market and registered as jobseekers with the Unified Social Service. It prioritises mountain, high-mountain and border communities and vulnerable groups, including households with persons with disabilities. Support is paid per unit of work performed, typically AMD 4 000 per worker-day and AMD 5 000 per hour for agricultural machinery, for a maximum programme duration of 180 days. Participation is formalised through an individual plan and a contract with the territorial centre, with monthly payments based on output monitoring. The income received is not counted in the poverty assessment of households. The scheme is not disability-specific and does not include adaptations or reasonable accommodation, which limits accessibility and impact for persons with disabilities. According to interview findings, the programme was discontinued in 2025 without any public announcement or official explanation.

In February 2023, the Government also introduced a programme to assist employers in providing reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities. Even though the scheme allowed for reimbursement of related costs, no employer had applied for support under this measure by mid-July of the same year (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2023). The Government subsequently cancelled the programme, citing low uptake and the need to redesign its implementation mechanism.

Information and promotion measures directed at employers are minimal. The USS provides some counselling to employers, but there are no systematic campaigns to raise awareness or demonstrate the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities. Employer associations are not regularly engaged, and social dialogue structures have not prioritised disability employment. NGOs occasionally implement sensitisation activities with individual companies, but these are project-based and small in scale.

In conclusion, there are virtually no meaningful incentives for employers in Armenia to recruit or retain persons with disabilities. Demand-side measures are either non-functional or not disability-specific, which severely constrains the impact of labour market policies. Substantial reform is required in order to operationalise the quota system, introduce targeted tax and financial incentives, and incorporate disability into employer support programmes.

5 LINKAGES BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER POLICY AREAS

5.1 From school to the labour market

Schools across the country remain largely inaccessible to persons with disabilities, although some progress has been made in preschool inclusion and reforms in mainstream education. Many new educational facilities are still being constructed without meeting accessibility standards. The continued existence of special schools that segregate children with disabilities, combined with the lack of adequate support in mainstream settings, forces many children to leave their families and travel to Yerevan for education. Blind and deaf students remain particularly excluded due to the absence of Armenian Sign Language interpreters and adapted learning materials. In higher education, universities are formally obliged to provide reasonable accommodation but consistently fail to do so in practice, with no effective legal remedies available for students (Disability Rights Agenda NGO, 2025). These systemic shortcomings reduce educational attainment among persons with disabilities and undermine their transition into the labour market. No structured programmes exist to support the school-to-work transition, leaving young people with disabilities without tailored career guidance or work-based learning opportunities.

Recent legislative developments show some progress. In 2024, Armenia adopted a new Law on Vocational Education and Training, which for the first time introduces inclusive education principles into the VET system. The law requires institutions to provide accessible learning environments, ensure reasonable accommodation and promote the participation of learners with disabilities in vocational programmes. In 2025, the Law on Higher Education and Science was also adopted, introducing specific measures on disability inclusion, including obligations to provide accessible infrastructure, adapted curricula and support services. This marks the first time that higher education legislation has explicitly regulated disability-related inclusion (National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, 2025).

5.2 Skills development opportunities

Armenia does not have adult education instruments specifically designed for persons with disabilities. Career guidance is provided through the Public Employment Service, but it is universal in nature, with no adapted methodologies, specialised counsellors or assistive tools. As a result, guidance services have limited relevance for adults facing disability-related barriers.

The 2024 VET law introduced new mechanisms that could indirectly benefit adults with disabilities: micro-credentials and short-term training that allow individuals to acquire specific skills in a flexible format and build them into full qualifications over time. These are well suited to persons with disabilities who may not be able to engage in full-length programmes. However, micro-credentials are at an early stage of implementation, and no provisions exist to ensure their accessibility or to fund reasonable accommodation.

NGOs occasionally deliver training for persons with disabilities, often supported by international donors, but these initiatives are small in scale, fragmented and not embedded into the national qualification framework. A recurring issue is that many of these programmes are gender-stereotyped and focused on low-value skills such as sewing, make-up, nail art or similar short courses. While they provide some opportunities for income generation, they rarely create sustainable employment pathways and tend to reinforce traditional roles rather than expand career choices for women and men with disabilities.

The ETF Torino Process Review of Policies for Lifelong Learning in Armenia (2024) also refers to measures facilitating access to vocational education for persons who acquired a disability during

military service, implemented as part of state-supported reintegration programmes. However, broader inclusion of persons with disabilities in the VET system remains limited.

5.3 How social benefits support the employment of persons with disabilities

Disability pensions and allowances provide essential income security for persons with disabilities. Entitlement is based on official recognition of disability status through the functionality assessment system, with benefit amounts varying according to the assessed degree of limitation. However, benefit levels remain low and insufficient to cover the minimum consumer basket, leaving many recipients below the poverty line.

Although disability benefits are not formally withdrawn when a recipient takes up work, they are counted as household income in the national poverty assessment system. This reduces eligibility for additional poverty-targeted support and creates a **'benefit trap'** in which households gain little or no net advantage from employment.

A further issue arises from the use of imputed income within the poverty assessment system. Families may be treated as if they had income from agricultural land, livestock, or from the presumed labour capacity of a household member, even when no such income exists. In addition, when an individual is offered a job through the Unified Social Service and refuses it, imputed income may be recorded against the household as though the person had accepted the job and was earning wages. This approach penalises refusal, regardless of whether the job offer was accessible, suitable, or compatible with the individual's disability-related needs and preferences. **As a result, households can be excluded from poverty-targeted benefits based on income that does not actually exist.**

5.4 Access to social services

Access to social services remains a decisive factor shaping the labour market participation of persons with disabilities in Armenia. Since 2024, the Government has piloted the provision of personal assistance services, starting with 100 beneficiaries selected on a first-come, first-served basis (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2022). The scheme links eligibility to being in employment or education, which runs counter to the principle that personal assistance is a fundamental requirement for independent living rather than an employment-specific instrument. As a result, many persons with disabilities who require support to perform daily activities remain excluded.

Other targeted services exist but they are narrow in scope. Social-psychological rehabilitation for persons with visual impairments is outsourced by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to NGOs. This includes orientation and mobility training with white canes and support to overcome social and psychological barriers to independent living (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2025).

The state supplies assistive products and technologies including wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, canes, hearing aids, prostheses and orthoses via a voucher system managed by the Unified Social Service (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2024). However, the provision is hampered by inadequate funding, limited product options, weak coordination between the health, social and education sectors and a lack of service standards and professional training. Products are frequently distributed without accompanying rehabilitation, training or follow-up, resulting in abandonment or ineffective use (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2025).

Insufficient reliable data on coverage and unmet needs hamper effective evidence-based planning. According to a rapid assessment by WHO, just 6.5% of individuals needing products (apart from spectacles) receive them (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2024). In addition, there is little

monitoring and evaluation of how personal assistance, rehabilitation or other support services affect labour market participation.

5.5 Accessibility

Accessibility in Armenia continues to face systemic physical, digital and informational barriers.

Although accessibility standards were formally adopted as early as 2006, enforcement has remained weak (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2006). The main issue lies in monitoring: the designated inspection body does not possess the expertise to evaluate accessibility compliance, and certificates of operation for new buildings are often granted without meaningful checks. As a result, many public buildings, including universities, schools and government offices, remain inaccessible, and even state-funded construction projects fail to incorporate accessibility requirements.

In the digital domain, the country's disability rights law obliges the government to adopt and enforce digital accessibility standards. However, these standards have not been adopted in practice, leaving the legal provision largely symbolic.

Government digital platforms such as e-disability.am (for disability assessment), transport.yerevan.am and tax declaration portals remain inaccessible to many users with disabilities. Employment platforms, including workforall.am and e-work.am, are also not compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), forcing users to visit Unified Social Service offices in person to complete procedures and thereby creating additional barriers (Disability Rights Agenda NGO, 2025).

Information accessibility is another gap. Public information campaigns, legal texts and government websites are rarely provided in accessible formats such as Armenian Sign Language, Easy-to-Read, or audio. This excludes large groups of persons with disabilities from participating equally in public and professional life.

Overall, the lack of specialised monitoring mechanisms and the Government's failure to adopt and enforce digital accessibility standards mean that accessibility obligations remain on paper. Without reforms that include proper enforcement, training and institutional capacity, accessibility will continue to lag behind Armenia's commitments under the CRPD.

5.6 Gender dimension of policies supporting employment of persons with disabilities

Women with disabilities face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, both as women and as persons with disabilities. This results in significant lower labour market participation, fewer opportunities to access services and a higher risk of poverty compared to men with disabilities.

According to the 2023 Labour Force Survey, the labour force participation rate of men with disabilities was 27.6% compared to only 17.2% for women with disabilities. Similarly, the employment-to-population ratio stood at 24.9% for men and only 15.7% for women. Women with disabilities are thus less likely to enter the labour force, less likely to be employed if active and more likely to remain outside employment entirely.

Access to public employment services reflects the same imbalance. Administrative data show that women with disabilities represent only 2.3% of all registered unemployed women, while men with disabilities make up 6.8% of all registered unemployed men. This suggests that women with disabilities are less visible to employment services and less likely to register as jobseekers. Interviews with stakeholders confirm that gender norms and caregiving responsibilities discourage women with disabilities from seeking formal employment, while non-accessible services further reinforce their exclusion.

Existing employment policies rarely address the gender dimension of disability. The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities prohibits discrimination but does not explicitly cover multiple or intersectional discrimination. The Comprehensive Programme for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2023–2027) acknowledges the specific barriers faced by women with disabilities but contains no concrete employment measures or indicators for them as a group. The Gender Equality Strategy (2025–2028) also overlooks disability as a category, meaning that women with disabilities fall between two policy frameworks without adequate recognition.

Civil society reports highlight that women with disabilities are often channelled into stereotypical vocational programmes such as sewing, make-up or nail art, which reinforce traditional roles, rather than being afforded improved access to sustainable well-paid employment. Few initiatives focus on building digital skills, leadership or access to non-traditional sectors.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Analysis of Armenian policies supporting **the employment of persons with disabilities reveals a significant gap between formal commitments and practical outcomes**. In recent years, the legal and strategic framework has expanded and increasingly reflects international standards. However, implementation remains fragmented, under-resourced and weakly enforced. As a result, persons with disabilities continue to experience substantial exclusion from the labour market.

Important legislative and policy developments have taken place: the 2021 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities aligns national legislation with the CRPD. Armenia has adopted the Employment Strategy 2025–2031, the Comprehensive Programme for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities 2023–2027 and the Gender Equality Strategy 2025–2028. In addition, the introduction of personal assistance services and the adoption of a new VET law with inclusive provisions signal initial steps towards systemic change. However, strategic coherence is limited. Disability, employment and gender equality are addressed in separate policy documents with insufficient integration. The Employment Strategy does not operationalise disability inclusion, and the Gender Equality Strategy does not adequately address women with disabilities. This fragmentation weakens accountability and dilutes policy impact.

Despite this progress, labour market outcomes remain deeply unequal: persons with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be outside the labour force as persons without disabilities, and participation among women with disabilities is particularly low.

Several critical factors undermine the relevance and efficiency of policies supporting the employment of persons with disabilities.

1. The system is not operational. There is a gap between declarative rights and enforceable instruments.

Although anti-discrimination provisions and the right to reasonable accommodation are established in the law, enforcement mechanisms are weak. Employer obligations remain largely declarative. Demand-side measures are particularly underdeveloped. The quota system exists in legislation but is not implemented, which means that there are no mechanisms for monitoring compliance; fines for non-compliance are not collected and, consequently, there is no dedicated financing mechanism to support disability-specific employment measures. Attempts to reform the quota framework have stalled due to limited political consensus, suggesting that future reforms may face similar resistance at the political level.

The pilot programme on reasonable accommodation failed due to low uptake and design shortcomings. This illustrates that the challenge is not only weak enforcement but also insufficiently user-centred policy design. Overall, policy instruments targeting employers are either non-functional, poorly designed or insufficiently promoted.

Even instruments that are formally in place focus heavily on financial incentives for employers without providing broader support. There is also a lack of complementary advisory services to support employers in inclusive recruitment, workplace integration, reasonable accommodation and employee retention.

2. The Unified Social Service needs further consolidation and capacity building to act as an inclusive employment service.

Public employment services are formally open to persons with disabilities but are not adapted to their needs. Specialised counselling, supported employment, vocational rehabilitation and systematic case

management are not available. USS staff lack specific training in disability inclusion and workplace adaptation.

The current model relies on generic services that assume equal starting points. This approach fails to address structural barriers faced by persons with disabilities. Consequently, the employment service does not function as an inclusive gateway into the labour market for persons with disabilities. Moreover, interruptions in programme delivery in previous years reveal weaknesses in continuity, accountability and institutional capacity.

Monitoring and evaluation systems are inadequate. There is no systematic collection of data on the participation of persons with disabilities in employment programmes, their employment retention, career progression or job quality. Without reliable outcome data, evidence-based policy development remains constrained.

Stakeholder coordination mechanisms are either inactive or function only formally. Civil society organisations provide valuable support but operate on a small scale and without sustainable funding. The lack of structured cooperation and clear leadership reduces the effectiveness of existing measures.

3. Structural and cross-cutting barriers still undermine employment outcomes

Employment policy cannot succeed in isolation. Persistent barriers in accessibility, education, social services and social protection continue to limit participation.

Non-accessible workplaces and digital platforms, insufficient provision of assistive technologies and limited access to personal assistance, all restrict the ability of persons with disabilities to seek and retain employment. At the same time, elements of the poverty assessment system – particularly the use of imputed income – may discourage labour market participation by reducing household benefits without generating sufficient income gains.

Strategic fragmentation further weakens impact. Disability, employment and gender equality policies are addressed in separate frameworks with limited integration. Women with disabilities face compound discrimination but remain insufficiently targeted in either employment or gender policies.

It is essential to address these structural constraints – through accessible environments, employment-compatible social protection, integrated strategies and gender-responsive measures – if sustainable inclusion is to be achieved.

In summary, Armenia has established a comprehensive formal framework for disability inclusion in employment. However, the system lacks operational mechanisms, targeted instruments, effective coordination, dedicated financing and reliable monitoring. Without structural reforms that translate legal commitments into practical, adequately funded and enforceable measures, persons with disabilities will remain largely excluded from the labour market.

6.2 Recommendations

The proposed set of recommendations focuses on key challenges relating to policies supporting the employment of persons with disabilities.

Strengthen data systems and evidence-based policy

Armenia should develop a coherent data and evaluation framework to support the creation of an evidence-based employment policy for persons with disabilities, as follows.

Firstly, it should improve the availability, accessibility and quality of statistical data. This includes the systematic collection and publication of disability-disaggregated data on wages, job retention, job quality, informal employment, transitions between inactivity and employment, and participation in

education and training. These data should be stored in a way that permits cross-tabulation by gender, age, region and type of disability, enabling more precise policy targeting.

Secondly, it should strengthen analytical capacity and research, commissioning regular analytical studies examining the structural and behavioural factors affecting the labour market situation of persons with disabilities. This research should incorporate the perspectives of key stakeholders: persons with disabilities, their families, employers, public institutions and service providers in order to identify barriers, incentives and unintended policy effects. Particular attention should be given to employer behaviour, the effectiveness of reasonable accommodation mechanisms and the interaction between employment and social protection systems.

Thirdly, it should establish a structured monitoring and evaluation framework for all employment-related programmes affecting persons with disabilities. This should include:

- a core set of measurable output and outcome indicators (e.g., participation rates, job placement rates, retention at 6 and 12 months, earnings progression and transition to employment on the open labour market);
- compulsory disability-disaggregated reporting for all active labour market programmes;
- regular formative evaluations to improve programme design;
- periodic independent impact evaluations of selected measures before scaling up.

Finally, it should formalise data-sharing and cooperation mechanisms between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Statistical Committee, the Unified Social Service and organisations of persons with disabilities. Clear protocols should ensure data protection while enabling policy-relevant analysis. Structured data exchange would improve coordination, reduce duplication and strengthen accountability.

A stronger evidence base is essential not only for measuring progress but also for prioritising reforms, allocating resources effectively and building political support for inclusive employment policies.

Make the system operational: move from declarative rights to enforceable and effective instruments

Sustainable increases in the employment of persons with disabilities require active employer engagement. However, experience shows that most employers do not change recruitment practices without both incentives and structured support. Employer engagement often follows a cumulative dynamic: as more companies successfully employ persons with disabilities, inclusive practices become normalised and perceived risks decrease. Public policy must therefore create the conditions for this virtuous cycle to emerge.

Firstly, the existing legal instruments need to be operationalised. The quota system provided for in legislation should be fully implemented through:

- a clear monitoring and reporting system for employers;
- transparent procedures for checking compliance;
- regular feedback to employers on their obligations and performance;
- an effective mechanism for collecting compensatory payments from non-compliant employers; an adjustment period for employers could, however, be provided before this mechanism is activated.

The funds collected should be channelled into a dedicated and transparent Inclusive Employment Fund used exclusively to finance disability-related employment measures. Public reporting on the use and outcomes of these funds is essential to ensure credibility and accountability. At the same time, public institutions should act as model employers, demonstrating compliance and good practice.

Secondly, Armenia should introduce dedicated demand-side instruments that directly support inclusive hiring. These might include:

- short- and medium-term wage subsidy schemes for persons entering or re-entering the labour market;
- grants or reimbursement schemes for reasonable accommodation and assistive technologies;
- supported internships and trial employment placements;
- retention subsidies for employers maintaining employment beyond initial placement.

These instruments should be designed through structured consultation with employers, organisations of persons with disabilities and implementing agencies. User-centred design will increase uptake, feasibility and sustainability, thereby avoiding the low participation observed in previous initiatives.

Thirdly, structured employer support services should be established. An Employer Advisory Service should provide practical guidance on inclusive recruitment, workplace adaptation, team integration, retention strategies and legal obligations. This service could be hosted within the Unified Social Service or implemented in partnership with employer organisations or specialised NGOs. Quality standards, staff training and flexibility to address sector-specific needs are all critical to ensuring effectiveness.

Finally, complementary awareness and recognition measures should reinforce behavioural change. National information campaigns and the dissemination of practical guidance and details of employer award schemes promoting inclusive business practices can all help reduce stigma and showcase successful examples.

It is essential to move from declarative obligations to operational, enforceable, supportive instruments in order to generate measurable change in employer behaviour and create sustainable demand for the employment of persons with disabilities.

Transform the Unified Social Service into an inclusive employment agency

The Unified Social Service (USS), as Armenia's public employment service, should evolve from a generic service provider into an inclusive employment agency capable of addressing the specific barriers faced by persons with disabilities. It is essential to strengthen institutional capacity to ensure that employment services become an effective gateway to the labour market rather than a formal access point with limited practical impact.

This transformation should take place through four complementary steps.

Firstly, all frontline USS staff should be equipped with basic competencies in disability inclusion. This means including training on working with persons with different types of disabilities, reasonable accommodation, accessible communication and inclusive case management as a mandatory component of the core training package for employment counsellors and other key personnel. This would ensure that inclusive practice is embedded across the system rather than confined to isolated specialists.

Secondly, in addition to general training, a dedicated layer of specialised expertise is required. Several implementation models might be considered, including:

- designating and regularly training specialised disability employment officers at local offices;
- establishing regional mobile teams of specialists who support multiple territorial centres;
- outsourcing specialised functions (e.g. job coaching, vocational rehabilitation and employer mediation) to qualified NGOs under formal service contracts;
- combining internal specialisation with contracted external expertise.

The chosen model should ensure continuity, professional standards and clear accountability.

Thirdly, generic employment measures are insufficient to address structural barriers. The USS should develop and institutionalise disability-specific instruments designed in consultation with persons with disabilities, employers and service providers. Priority instruments include:

- **individualised employment plans** co-designed with jobseekers, ensuring personalised and goal-oriented support;
- **supported employment services** combining career counselling, job matching, employer mediation and structured on-the-job coaching;
- **vocational rehabilitation services** including assessment, retraining, upskilling and reintegration pathways for persons who acquire disabilities during employment.

These services should be integrated into the regular USS portfolio rather than implemented as temporary pilot projects.

Fourthly, in addition, all USS offices, digital tools and communication materials should comply with accessibility standards. This includes physical accessibility, accessible websites and online platforms, the availability of sign language interpretation where needed and the provision of information in accessible formats. To achieve this, Armenia should:

- develop or adapt national guidelines for accessible public employment services;
- conduct systematic accessibility audits of all USS offices and digital systems;
- implement a phased action plan to address identified gaps;
- allocate dedicated budget resources for accessibility improvements.

Strengthening the USS in this way would create the institutional foundation for inclusive employment policy. Without a capable specialised public employment service, other reforms – including quota implementation and employer incentives – are unlikely to produce sustainable results.

Strengthen the quality and coordination of public policies

Improving employment outcomes for persons with disabilities requires stronger coordination across public policies and more structured stakeholder participation. Fragmentation between disability, employment, education and social protection policies weakens overall impact.

The National Council on Disability Issues should be reactivated with a clear mandate, defined procedures and regular meetings. It should provide strategic oversight and ensure that disability employment remains a cross-government priority.

A permanent working group on disability and employment should be established at the operational level. This body should coordinate policies affecting labour market participation, review draft measures, identify implementation barriers and facilitate cooperation between ministries, the Unified Social Service and other institutions. Representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), civil society and social partners should be included to ensure structured dialogue and transparency.

Stakeholder participation should be strengthened through formal consultation mechanisms and targeted capacity-building. Small grants and partnership schemes can enable OPDs and NGOs to contribute to employment counselling, awareness-raising and peer support, while social partners should be encouraged to address disability employment within collective dialogue frameworks.

Finally, strategic documents concerning employment, disability and gender equality should include clear objectives, coordinated actions, measurable indicators and monitoring mechanisms relating to disability employment. Regular reporting would improve accountability and policy coherence.

Stronger governance and coordination are essential to moving from fragmented initiatives to a coherent results-oriented system.

Ensure that related public policies support the employment of persons with disabilities

Employment outcomes for persons with disabilities are shaped not only by labour market policies but also by education, social protection, accessibility and support services. These policy areas should

explicitly recognise employment as a key objective and be designed to remove barriers to labour market participation.

Firstly, the link between education, skills development and employment should be strengthened. The inclusive provisions of the Law on Vocational Education and Training (2024) should be implemented through improved accessibility of educational institutions, learning materials and training environments, as well as by strengthening the competencies of teachers and training staff in inclusive education. Structured school-to-work transition programmes should also be developed for learners with disabilities, including work-based learning opportunities such as internships and apprenticeships, improved career guidance and stronger cooperation between education institutions, public employment services and employers.

Secondly, the social protection system should be designed to encourage labour market participation. The current arrangements may unintentionally discourage employment. Reforms should ensure that persons with disabilities who take up employment or training do not face financial losses due to benefit reductions. In particular, the use of 'imputed income' in poverty assessments should be revised to avoid penalising individuals who are unable to take up unsuitable job offers or whose employment opportunities remain limited.

Thirdly, access to support services enabling employment should be expanded. Personal assistance services should be scaled up to reach a larger number of persons with disabilities and allow them to participate more actively in education and work. At the same time, the provision of assistive technologies should be improved in terms of quality, availability and appropriate fitting, and should be more closely linked with vocational rehabilitation and employment support services.

Finally, accessibility must be systematically strengthened. Compliance with accessibility standards in the built environment should be enforced through regular inspections and sanctions where necessary. National digital accessibility standards (such as WCAG 2.1) should be adopted and applied to all e-government and employment platforms. Accessibility requirements should also be incorporated into public procurement and all publicly funded infrastructure projects.

Ensuring that these related policy areas actively support employment will significantly strengthen the effectiveness of labour market measures for persons with disabilities.

6.3 Best practices

No best practices in the field of disability and employment were identified in Armenia. This suggests that the policy framework is still at an early stage of development and that there is a need to create greater space for piloting innovative approaches and testing new instruments supporting labour market inclusion.

In this context, Armenia could benefit from introducing mechanisms that encourage experimentation and learning, such as pilot programmes, small-scale innovation projects and targeted funding for new employment models. Such initiatives would allow policymakers and practitioners to test solutions, evaluate their effectiveness and scale up those that prove successful.

At the same time, stronger international cooperation could support this process. Exchange with stakeholders from other countries – including public employment services, organisations of persons with disabilities, employers and research institutions – can facilitate the transfer of knowledge, practical experience and tested policy solutions. Participation in international networks, peer-learning initiatives and joint projects could help inspire new approaches and accelerate the development of effective employment policies for persons with disabilities in Armenia.

ANNEX

List of institutions and organisations

The interviews were carried out with the following institutions and organisations:

- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs;
- Unified Social Service (previously the State Employment Agency);
- Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (VET Division);
- Human Rights Defender's Office (Disability Rights Division);
- Armenian Association of the Blind;
- NGO Disability Rights Agenda;
- NGO Unison;
- Rights Defense Center for Women with Disabilities;
- Armenian Deaf Association;
- NGO We Can;
- Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia.

ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active labour market policy
AWDA	Armenia Workforce Development Activity
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (between the EU and Armenia)
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
MLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OPD	Organisation of persons with disabilities
RA	Republic of Armenia
UN	United Nations
CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USS	Unified Social Service
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WHO	United Nations World Health Organization

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