

This report is prepared by Unison NGO to find out the discrimination on the ground of disability in Armenia within the framework of the "Combating discrimination on the grounds of disability in Armenia" project.



Discrimination on the Ground of Disability in Armenia (Survey)

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Abbreviations

MLSA - Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of RA

SC - Statistical Committee of RA

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

LGO - Local Government Organizations

PWD - Persons with disabilities

CSO - Civil Society Organization

HRD - Human Rights Defender of RA

R.A. - Refuse to Answer

D.K. - Don't know

Introduction

The discrimination against people with disabilities (PWDs) in Armenia has both social and institutional manifestations. The creation of an inclusive environment and a non-discriminatory environment in the society is foremost under the responsibility of State entities and institutions. In this regard, although some steps are being taken to create a barrier-free environment for PWDs, the measures taken so far are not systematized and pervasive. In recent years, only in Yerevan and in rare regions, the number of ramps has increased, and traffic lights with Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) are available; those are demonstratively placed in some of the central streets of the city. At the same time, accessible traffic lights are not interconnected to each other at other crossroads. In this regard, we believe that the reforms and measures taken in this field are insufficient, especially given the large number of people who acquired disabilities during the war. On the other hand, it is of utmost importance to ensure the social inclusion of PWDs in all spheres of public life through effective public awareness campaigns and educational programs. Although many State programs were initiated to increase the economic empowerment of PWDs, they are mostly of a formal nature and do not ensure the full involvement of PWDs in the public and labor market in particular.

This is why employment is the utmost important issue in almost all surveys and investigations. In the frameworks of our survey, almost all respondents mentioned the difficulties in finding a job and the clumsy, impolite, and discriminatory attitude towards PWDs as a main manifestation of the discrimination.

The main findings of the research are as follows:

- The analysis of the current situation of PWDs shows that it is impossible to consider the attitudes and existing policies related to PWDs as non-discriminatory. Additionally, the discrimination emerges on the basis of gender as well.
- The public environment is not adapted to the needs of PWDs.
- For most of PWDs, the important information on where and how they can acquire social support, participate in cultural, social and other community based events, apply for rights protection and/or get legal consultancy is not accessible; in most cases this negatively impacts the participation in public processes, human rights protection, and in turn brings discrimination and social isolation on the basis of disability.
- 60 percent of respondents are not satisfied with the amenities of public transportation, which in turn leads to the economic inactivity of PWDs.
 - On streets, crossroads, street crossings, in residential and public buildings, the amenities appropriate to PWDs don't exist. Primarily the buildings and their entrances aren't accessible, there are no ramps and elevators, and public transportation is not accessible.
 - Almost half of the respondents participate in the Local government and nationwide elections. It is worth mentioning that 78% of election absentees are from urban areas, i.e. in rural areas the political participation rate is significantly higher among the respondents.
 - The respondents take the most active participation in the decision making processes through elections: 69% or 83 persons noted that they participate in elections. Then, the activeness in decision making emerge in expressing the opinions through social media which was noted by 64% or 77 of respondents. Participation in municipal or local elections: that was noted by 79% or 95 of respondents. 74% or 89 respondents never participate in online law discussion through the e-draft website, 70% or 84 respondents do not participate in petitions, 68% or 81 respondents do not report complaints and 62% or 74 respondents don't participate in public discussions.
 - The vast majority of respondents, 69%, have ever experienced discrimination. At the same time, 58% of the respondents who faced discrimination were mainly respondents with physical and mobility impairments, 31% have 1st group disability, 29% - 2nd group, and 27% - 3rd. 38% of respondents who faced discrimination are men and 62% are women. That is, women are about 1.5 times more likely to face discrimination. No other forms of discrimination were reported on the basis of residence, education and age among respondents.
 - Because of their disabilities, the respondents are most concerned about earning money and starting a family in the future. Thus, 46 of the respondents fear that they may not be provided with a loan (credit sale), money if necessary due to their disability. Next, by frequency, 45 of the respondents fear that they will not find a partner to marry, or will not be able to create a family. Next, 32 respondents have fears they may be subject to bullying in public because of their disabilities. 34 respondents fear that their employer will offend or deride them at the workplace or during the interview. Respondents find less likely to be mistreated by a caregiver or nurse. Similarly, the probability of discrimination in educational institutions is low. According to the results, fears of meeting violence are also rare among respondents. Only 19 respondents marked having fear of physical attacks when they are in crowded places.
 - The vast majority of respondents have experienced unequal treatment, lack of reasonable facilities, and poor treatment in their lives. In this regard, it is clear that cases of violence on the basis of disability are very rare. 25% of the respondents stated they had never been discriminated against on the basis of the disability. Interestingly, more women

think they would probably meet discrimination if they were men. Thus, 65% of women fear that if they were men they would face discrimination and 35% of men think that discrimination would be possible if they were women.

- The majority of respondents (80) mention that when facing discrimination, they more often try to solve the problem on their own without any aid from others. Interestingly, more women (57%) marked that they usually solve the problem on their own without any help or intervention.

Research methodology

The purpose of the study

The aim of the research is to find out the manifestations of any type of discrimination against PWDs in Armenia in education, employment, social relations, healthcare and other spheres of life.

In order to achieve the goal of the research, the following tasks have been set:

- 1) Carry out desk research based on previous studies, legislative regulations, and materials related to the issue.
- 2) Examine the statistical data, indicators and tendencies.
- 3) Find out the participation of PWDs in the public life.
- 4) Find out the approaches of State entities towards the elimination of any kind of discrimination against PWDs.
- 5) Find out the manifestations of discrimination against PWDs.
- 6) Discover effective mechanisms for elimination of all forms of discrimination against PWDs.
- 7) Find out the accessibility of public goods (education, health, services, etc.) for PWDs, the manifestations of discrimination and the obstacles faced during the process of implementation of their rights.

Research object:

People with disabilities in Armenia

Subject of research:

Discrimination against PWDs in Armenia.

Definition of terms

Gender - the social aspect of the relationship between men and women, which is manifested in all spheres of life, including politics, economics, law, ideology, culture, education and science.

Gender equality - the equal legal status of women and men and equal opportunities for its realization, which enable individuals, regardless of gender, to freely express and use their abilities in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of life.

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Social inclusion is equal engagement of PWDs in society and active participation in the public life.

Discrimination is the act of making unjustified distinctions between human beings based on groups, classes, or other categories to which they belong. In this case, people on the basis of their disabilities may face discrimination, variation, exclusion or restriction which hinder PWDs to realize their rights and fundamental freedoms equally in political, social, cultural, civic and any other spheres.

Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages through verbal or nonverbal means, including speech or oral communication; writing and graphical representations (such as infographics, maps, and charts); and signs, signals, and behavior, as well as Braille, tactile, legible printing and other accessible information and communication tools.

Methods

In the frames of our research, about 120 respondents with disabilities were surveyed with the aid of Google forms.

1. ONLINE SURVEY

Online surveys are conducted when target groups are unreachable during the research timeline for various reasons. That is, face-to-face interviews are impossible to conduct because of financial shortages or timeframe.

The survey was conducted online given the sensitive aspects of the topic as well as the pandemic restrictions. In general, 120 online questionnaires were filled.

2. QUALITATIVE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Through qualitative in-depth interviews, the study of socio-economic, cultural, environmental changes and qualitative aspects of the phenomena becomes feasible to detect, as well as to assess the effectiveness of the social project. Through this method, the understanding of people's social experiences is achievable and it is possible to reconstruct

the events the researchers were not directly involved in. Qualitative in-depth interviews provide deep and meaningful information about individual practices. This type of interview is agile, dynamic, and gives an opportunity to expand the range of focused questions and deepen them during the interview by changing the sequence of questions.

During the research, key informant interviews were conducted among PWDs and policy makers. Both PWDs and key informants were selected using the snowball method. The purpose of using qualitative methods is to understand what forms of discrimination PWDs face in their life, and what protection mechanisms exist. In total, 8 interviews were conducted.

3. DESK RESEARCH

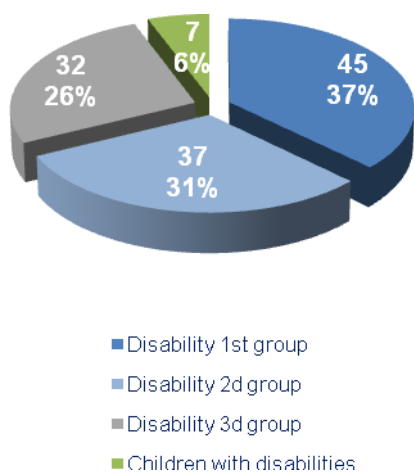
Every research starts with desk reviews that allow individuals to get acquainted with the research object and at the same time develop the research goals and purposes: Desk research is supposed to be a secondary analysis of the existing studies, papers, statistics, investigations, reports, etc.

For our investigation, the following sources were used and taken into consideration.

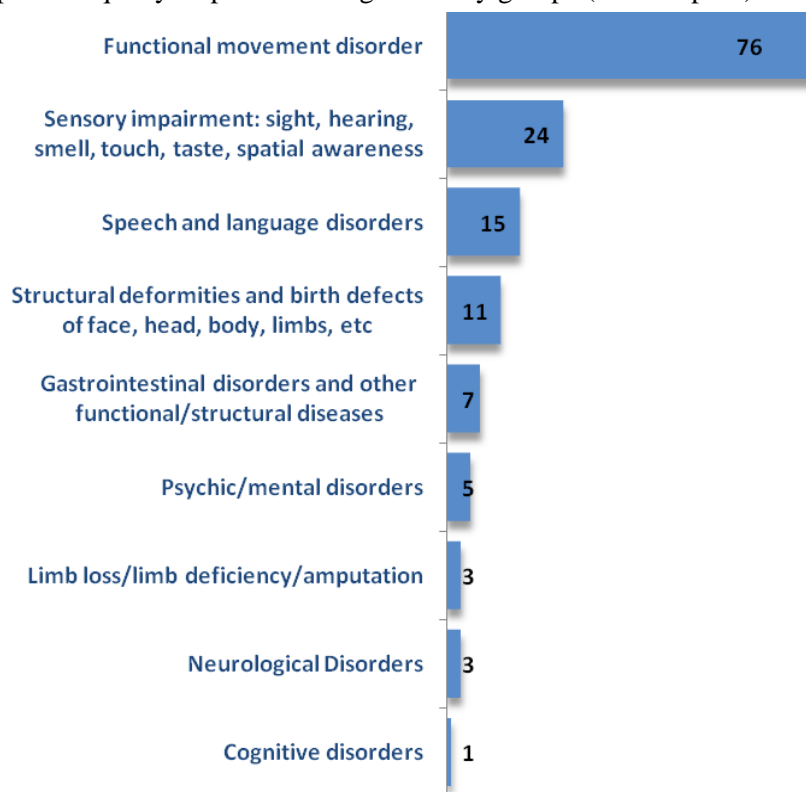
1. [Manual. Methods of legal protection in cases of discrimination. Council of Europe, Ara Ghazaryan, Yerevan, 2015. Armenian](#)
2. [Youth-focused and gender-sensitive labour market research in Armenia, 2018. English](#)
3. [2020 Annual Report on the activities of the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia and the situation of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms](#)
4. Quarterly data of the RA Statistical Committee on the socio-economic situation of the country
5. [RA Law on Ensuring Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, Draft Law of the RA on the Needs Assessment of Persons with Disabilities, Draft Law of RA On the Assessment of Person’s Functionality](#)

Sampling

The participants of the research were selected non-randomly by purposive sampling strategy, i.e. the link of the google form was sent to PWDs who were previously identified by the Snowball method¹: Although the sample is not representative, the data is reliable and can be used as a basis to shed light on different forms of discrimination against PWDs. In addition, PWDs included in the sample are equally dispersed among disability groups (see Graph 1).



Graph 1. Respondents by disability groups



Graph 2. Disability of the respondents by diseases

¹ Primarily, the survey was conducted among PWDs related to the Unison NGO and other partner organizations who had received the Google form. The survey link was available on the relevant Facebook platforms and on the Internet for about two months during the months of February-March of 2021.

At the same time, data was integrated with the information received from in-depth interviews, official statistics and other studies, ensuring the comprehensiveness and the validity of our research (triangulation²):

Legal grounds of elimination of discrimination against PWDs

Armenia has joined a number of international conventions to eliminate and exclude all forms of discrimination against PWDs, as well as some measures have been taken to eliminate discrimination by ensuring social inclusion and reasonable accommodation for PWDs. In the meantime, a number of international and national legal documents are dedicated to the protection of rights of PWDs. Thus, in 2010 Armenia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006. The definition of discrimination on the grounds of disability is given in the UN Convention (Article 2 (3)), where it says *"Disability discrimination" means any exclusion, prohibition or restriction on the grounds of disability, which aims to limit or minimize the recognition of human rights and fundamental freedoms; their application or utilization in the political, economic, social, cultural or in any other sphere on a par with others. It covers all forms of discrimination including denial to provide the necessary facilities.*

The Law on Social Protection of PWDs of RA adopted in 1993, is one of the major laws for PWDs. Then, in 2015 taking into consideration a number of shortcomings of the law, the draft law "On Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Social Inclusion" was developed and has been changed many times since then.

Taking the head of the gaps and shortcomings of the existing legislative regulations, the MLSA of RA has submitted a package of draft amendments to the related laws "On the Rights of PWDs" and "The person's functionality assessment", which were adopted by the National Assembly of RA in the first reading. Accordingly, this is an attempt to establish the necessary legal basis for the creation of equal opportunities and accessible conditions, facilities, elimination of discrimination and service provision appropriate to the needs of PWDs in all spheres of public life.

Additionally, the law on the person's functionality assessment involves the replacement of the existing medical and social examination system to the person's functionality assessment system. The purpose of the law is to introduce and provide services commensurate with the evaluated needs of PWDs through the adoption of a new model, since the current system is mostly based on a medical approach. As a result of the person's functionality assessment, instead of the disability groups (1st, 2nd, 3rd group and children disability), the degrees of a person's functionality limitation will be defined: slight, moderate, heavy, and deep. Accordingly, the disability assessment will be based not only on health issues, but also on the core factors of PWDs' personal activities and participation in the public life.

Although the changes in the legislative field are mostly positive, currently, one of the unresolved issues in Armenia still remains the social inclusion of PWDs and the creation of reasonable accommodation and facilities to ensure their full life in the society. The principle of "reasonable accommodation" means that PWDs should be provided with appropriate conditions to move freely and have a barrier-free environment that meets their needs. For example, if the employer, on other equal terms, has to hire a PWD or another applicant; in case of a PWD, he is obliged to create working conditions according to the needs of the applicant, i.e. the facilities for unimpeded movement, necessary items for work, accessibility of the environment, etc. In this regard, besides the international agreements and conventions, the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia ensures the prohibition of discrimination (Article 29). Additionally, the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Ensuring Equal Rights for Women and Men (2013) is connected to the elimination of discrimination against PWDs, that regulates the provision of equal rights for women and men and ensures their equal opportunities in politics, public administration, employment, entrepreneurship, healthcare, education and in other spheres taking into account the needs of women with disabilities as well. Moreover, the term "gender discrimination" is used in the law that prohibits discrimination on the ground of gender: the law promotes the culture of gender equality and the elimination of gender stereotypes emerged by the discriminatory practices, and highlights the urgency to establish a national mechanism for gender equality.

In addition to the above-mentioned legislative regulations, the research participants find that some official decisions and agreements should be submitted to promote the PWDs involvement in State structures by defining a quota system for State staff. This issue is justified by the fact that the protection of PWDs interests and rights in the private sector is mostly neglected, meantime all guarantees are created for state employees to be properly paid in accordance to their work, to have health and social protection, and the conditions complied with other provisions of the law. There is also a need for comprehensive measures to eliminate discrimination against PWDs in the fields of education, culture, sports and science. According to many respondents, inclusiveness of the education system has had its benefits and positive impact that needs to be adopted in other spheres as well. For instance, the Ministry of High-Tech Industry of RA may become the next pioneer after the Ministry of Emergency Situations in terms of inclusive practices.

² Triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon. By combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials, researchers hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that arise from single method, single-observer, and single-theory studies.

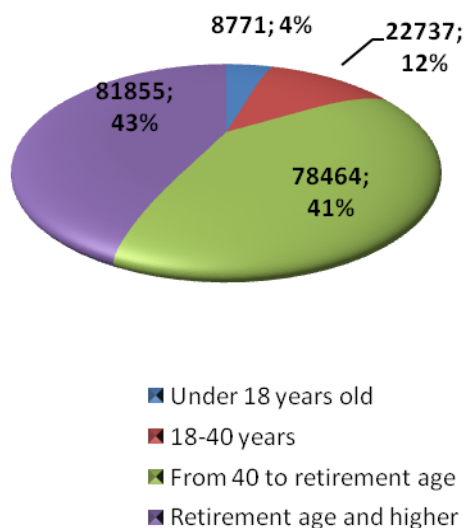
According to the respondents, inclusion policy also contributes to public education and awareness-raising on how to communicate with PWDs and how to avoid discrimination and vicious phenomena of differentiation and exclusion. In addition, it increases the protection of PWDs' rights and has a positive impact on the environment.

It is worth mentioning that many CSOs have made an invaluable contribution to the creation of a non-discriminatory environment for PWDs in Armenia through their activities, work and dedication. However, there is a need for an effective and strong cooperation between CSOs and State institutions, since PWDs are still among the most isolated groups in our society.

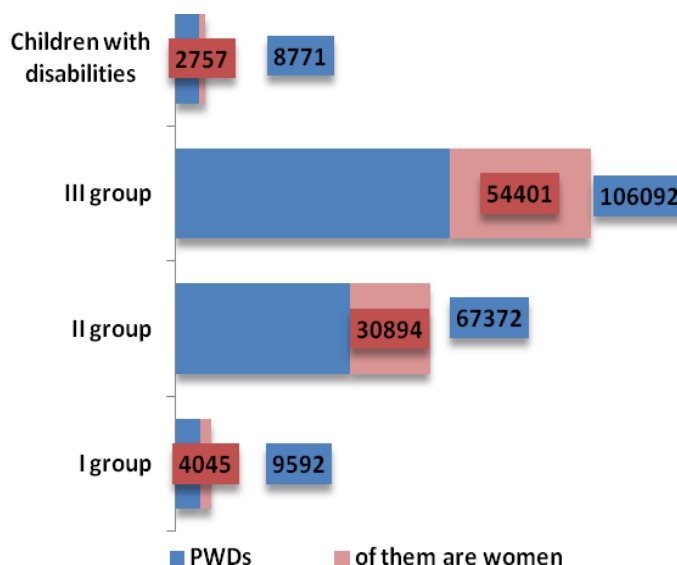
Thus, PWDs continuously face discrimination in our society.

- Laws and state policy do not create a barrier-free environment to ensure PWDs' full life in the society.
- Economic and social discrimination create significantly fewer opportunities for PWDs to work and to ensure their economic empowerment.
- PWDs face exploitation and abuse in the labor market because of the apparent discrimination patterns in our society.
- Besides the disability discrimination, PWDs experience discrimination based on other grounds, such as gender, age, social status, etc.
- PWDs face discrimination determined not only by a negative attitude, exclusion, separation, stigmatization in our society, but also by the absence of state policy or legislation due to which their rights are not expressed and recognized in health, education and other spheres.

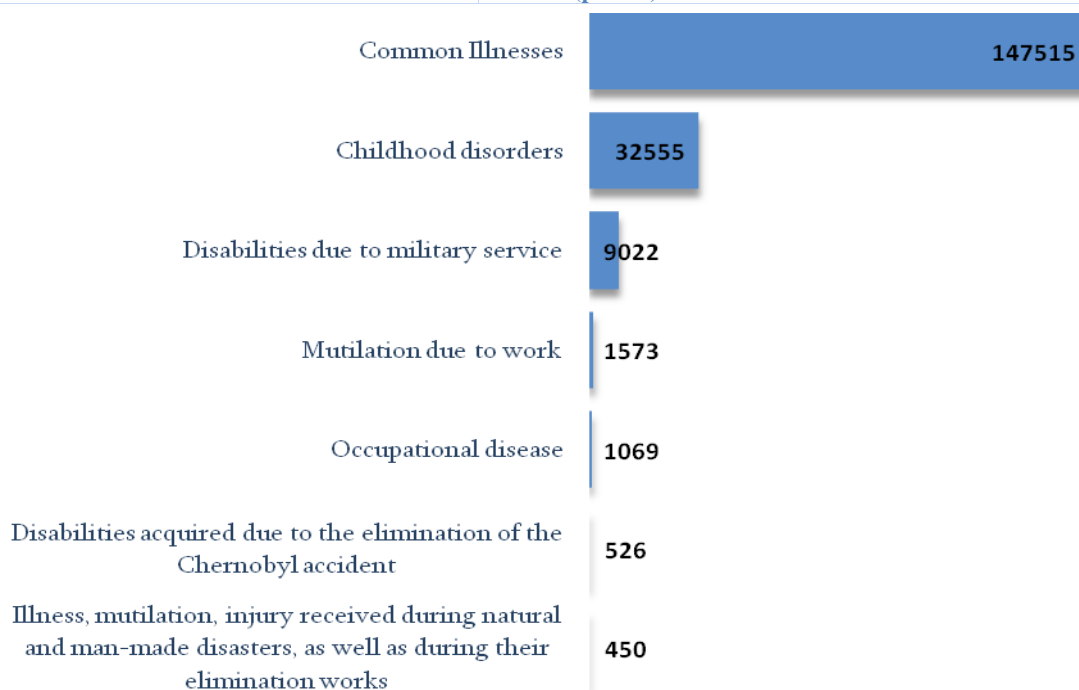
The current situation of PWDs in Armenia



Graph 3. Number of registered PWDs by age groups, by the end of 2020



Graph 4. Number of registered PWDs by disability groups, by the end of 2020 (person)



Graph 5. Number of registered PWDs by the reasons of disability, by the end of 2020 (person)

Although certain measures are being taken in Armenia to eliminate discrimination against PWDs within the framework of state policy and legislation, the situation remains the same with slight positive changes that are episodic in nature. The elimination of discrimination against PWDs and providing appropriate facilities for them is still one of the most important issues in our country. Moreover, the PWDs who participated in the survey found that the existing policies of state agencies should be changed: simultaneously with the creation of equal conditions and facilities, new guarantees for ensuring the socioeconomic involvement and empowerment are needed. For example, when hiring someone employers give (including PWDs) equal starting opportunities and tend to treat the skills and knowledge of the candidates equally while, for example, it may take extra time and effort for PWDs to pass the test. Thus most of the PWDs are convinced that in this case the defined equality starts from very unequal conditions. That is, PWDs objectively do not have the same starting conditions but have to compete on an equal footing in the labor market, in economic, educational, social and in other spheres of public life. It means that in addition to their difficulties, other obstacles are added: bad economic situation, difficult customs, tax procedures, etc.

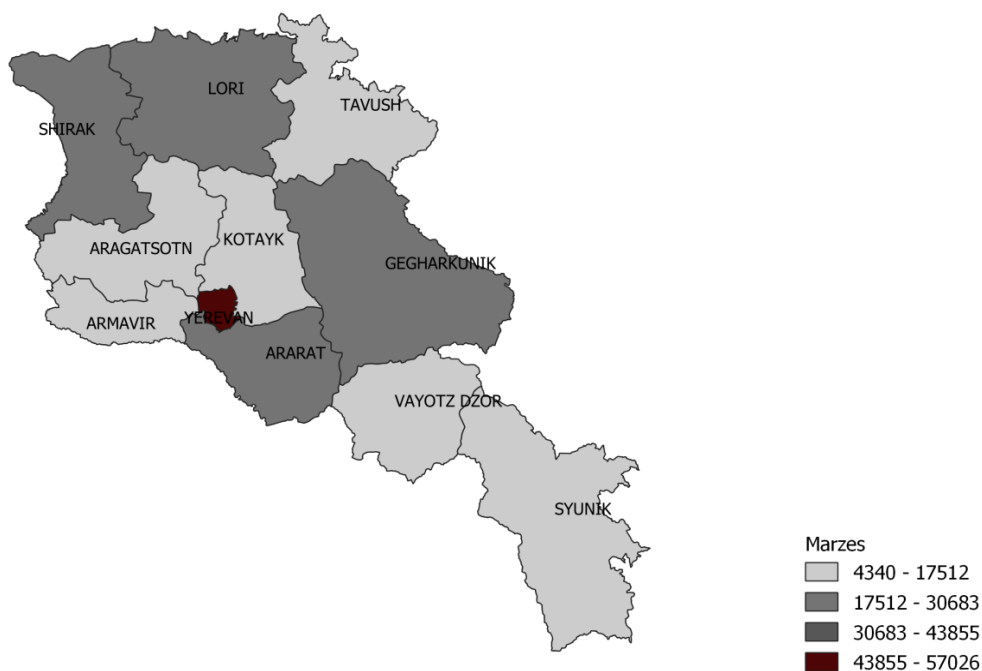
The above mentioned situation also occurs during the adjustment of the environment to PWDs needs, that must be done when organizing community and administrative services, socio-economic and political events, etc.

The study of the current situation of PWDs in Armenia shows that the attitude towards them and the existing policies cannot be considered as non-discriminatory and/or equal. At the same time, the discrimination is manifested on the basis of gender, i.e. there are cases of double discrimination.

At the same time, it should be noted that Armenia lacks proper state statistics showing in which spheres PWDs are most involved and to what extent their special needs are presented in State programs.

However, based on official statistics, we present the general picture. Thus, at the end of 2020, the total number of PWDs registered in Armenia was 191,827 people, of which 92,097 (48%) were women, and the number of people recognized as PWD for the first time was 11,555. At the same time, last year the number of PWDs for the same period of time was 192,013, i.e. it increased by 814 (0.4%). Interestingly, the majority of children with disabilities are male (69%). In the meantime men predominate over women among all PWDs too. If we observe by the geographical location, we will notice that the number of PWDs is higher in Yerevan - 57 026 people, followed by Shirak region (18 860), Lori (18 826), and the lowest - Vayots Dzor region (4 340).

The number of registered PWDs by the marzes of Armenia



Graph 6. Number of PWDs by regions, end of 2020

Moreover, as can be seen from Graph 4, the 3rd group of disability is predominant. And if we consider the number of PWDs by their diseases, then the first three having the largest number will be: diseases of the circulatory system (55858), mental and behavioral disorders (21103) and visual impairments (15352). In the meantime, many respondents of our research reported that public places for people with visual impairments still remain inaccessible and unadjusted. Not only special Braille signs and/or signposts, beeps, etc. are absent, but also the technological solutions for people with visual impairments in various state institutions, social and health care centers, cultural and public places are not sufficient.

"The most important thing for PWDs is the insufficient financial discriminatory situation in Armenia. I would ask state representatives to live on a monthly disability pension for a month. They would definitely acquire a disability. In addition, it is a discriminatory, fascist approach to PWDs - to classify the disabilities (for example, disability associated with war-related experience) and give them privileges accordingly. There is a big difference in pensions between different groups of disabilities."

In this regard, though the issues of PWDs are diverse and complicated, for many, the most pressing issue in Armenia is the inefficiency of social and economic inclusion programs. Though the State implements some projects to increase the participation of PWDs in the labor market, the vast majority of them do not have a high level of sustainability. That is, employers often take advantage of state benefits for a period of time and then dismiss employees with

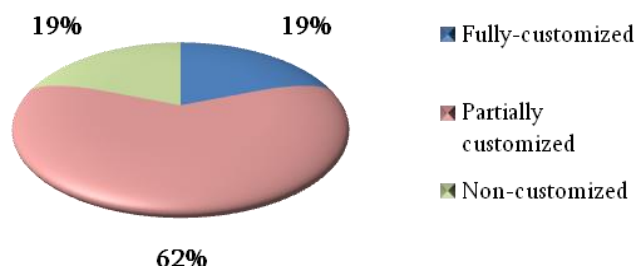
disabilities and replace them with new ones. Additionally, there are many cases when PWDs are exploited and abused in the labor market: they are not paid for the work done, the employer pays the salary with delays, etc., as evidenced by the respondents of our study.

“...The exploitation of PWDs in the labor market occurs more often. I work from home, there were several owners with whom I interacted remotely and it happened that I worked from home and my work efficiency was low and they deceived me. This is not discrimination, but abuse. I work from home and I have not told anyone that I have a disability and I have never manipulated that fact, but if I had told them that, they would have definitely used it against me. People have that ignorant opinion, that you can do nothing, moreover, they are scared of the word disability.”

If we explore the economic activity of people with disabilities, we can see that it is very low. Thus, the number of the population outside the labor force in relation to the number of labor resources in 2019 was 69.3%, of which men - 60.7% and women - 72.8%. That is, the economic activity of women with disabilities is lower. Moreover, in regards to the rural and urban areas, the economic activity is higher in rural areas, since the share of the population outside the labor force is higher in urban areas - 73.7% than in rural - 62%. And the reason is that in rural areas the PWDs are more often involved in agricultural work and/or are self-employed. The studies also show that in rural areas and in the marzes of Armenia difficulties of PWDs increase twice in the absence of accessible infrastructure services.

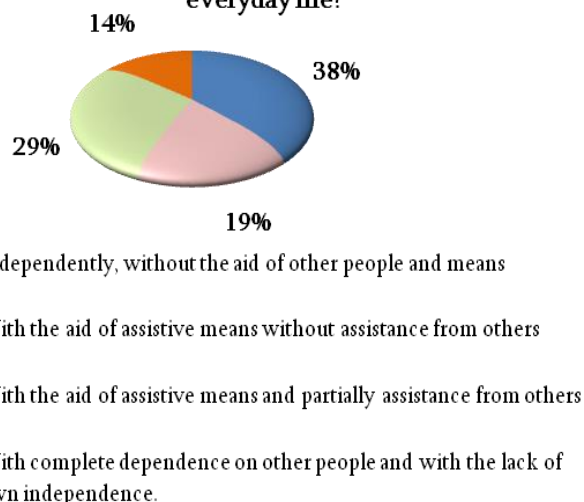
The accessibility of environment for PWDs

How well does your environment fit your needs?



Graph 7. Adjustment of the environment to the needs of the PWDs

How do you ensure your activities in everyday life?



Graph 8. Means of activity and life support for PWDs

The majority of survey participants across the country are dissatisfied with the conditions created for PWDs. At the same time, there is no need for additional adjustments due to some types of disabilities. 30% of those, who have stated that the environment is not at all adjusted to their needs, are from rural areas.

Most of them are convinced that the ramps at building entrances in the cities are not passable at all, in some cases they are even dangerous. Therefore, the issue is urgent not only in rural areas, but also in urban areas. 65% of those who stated that the environment is not adjusted at all are people with mobility impairments and a few have visual and hearing impairments. There is no significant correlation in regards to the level of independency of PWDs. That is, even those who are able to support themselves on their own, believe that the environment is not suitable not only for them but also for people with other types of disabilities in general. On the other side, the public awareness of how to communicate efficiently with PWDs is low.

“I would like to see professional literature available in the form of talking books and people treating PWDs equally without pity and frightened faces.”

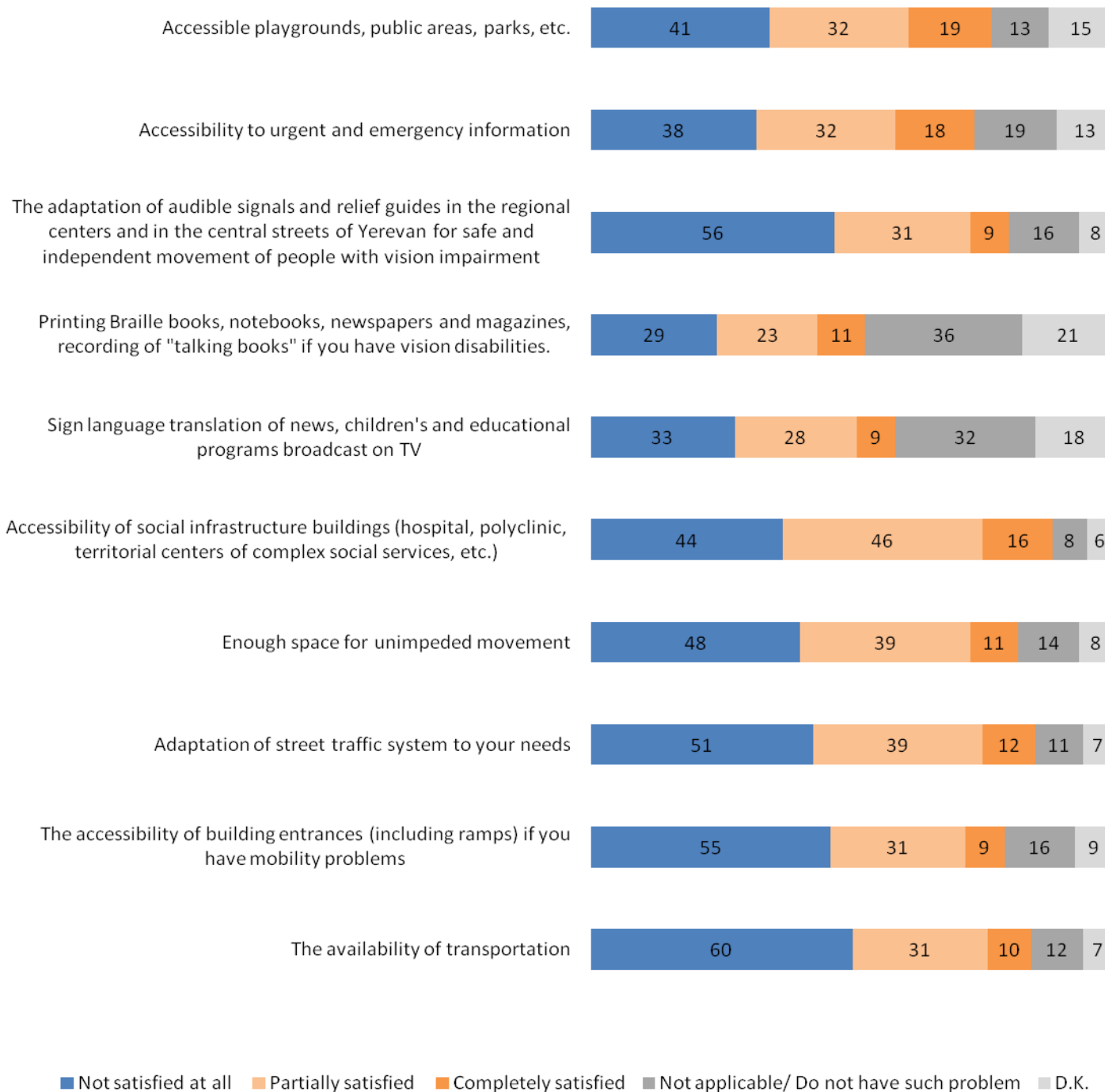
As can be seen from the following graph, public areas are mostly inaccessible for respondents. Thus, for many, daily walks in public spaces are not possible due to the lack of facilities. Another apparent issue concerns communication - the right to be informed, which according to the interviewed expert has an utmost importance in our country. For most of the PWDs the information of where and how to get social assistance, to take part in cultural, social and other community events, to apply for rights protection and/or to get legal advice/consultation is not accessible, which in turn leads to a lower participation and engagement in the public life, low level of rights protection and simultaneously increases the level of discrimination against PWDs and brings isolation.

Another big issue is the absence of accessibility to public transportation. 60% of respondents are not satisfied with the conveniences of transport services at all which in turn leads to an economic inactivity of PWDs. For people who have hearing impairments, no LED screens with names of the stops exist.

There are also no light and sound devices for the people with visual impairments which could help them find out the actual location and the next stop of the vehicle. In the meantime, no video communication devices in public areas are available for deaf people.

Thus, as can be identified from the data received, no facilities appropriate to the needs of PWDs in the streets, passages, residential and administrative buildings exist: the building entrances are mostly not smooth, there are no ramps, elevator facilities, and access to public transportation.

How satisfied are you with the following conditions/amenities in your city/community?



Graph 9. Respondents' satisfaction with the facilities of their city / community

The access to social infrastructures, transportation, health, education, sports, and other institutions is also problematic for 44% of respondents. Thus, the creation of a favorable and barrier-free environment for the full public life of PWDs is one of the most important imperatives today.

Mapping the specific needs of the respondents

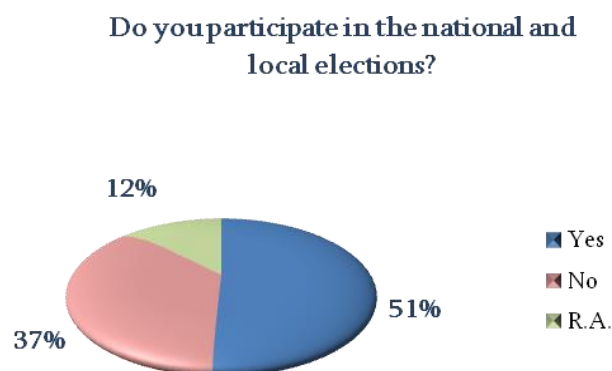
Providing an accessible environment adjusted to the needs of PWDs can not only eliminate social exclusion/isolation for the majority of respondents but also increase their opportunities of social inclusion.

In this regard, the respondents also mentioned the needs that require urgent measures; we present them in the form of a table below, by frequencies.

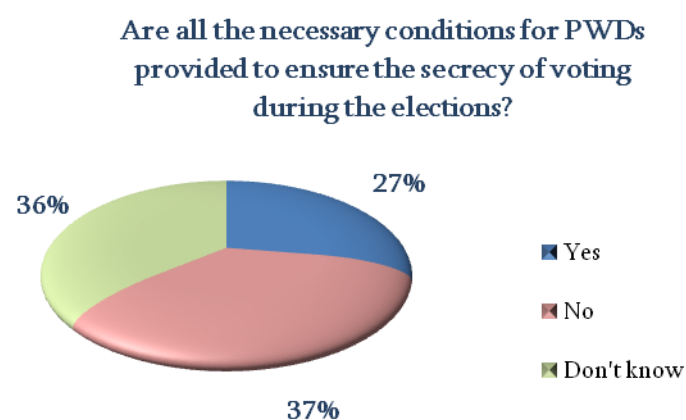
NEEDS	FREQUENCES
Provision of employment	17
Accessibility of building entrances and availability ramps	10
Adjusted, accessible and/or free public transport for PWDs	9
Free medical care, health services, surgery	8
Accessibility of the environment	5
Financial support	4
Special services (logopedic therapy, physiotherapy, social pedagogue services, etc.)	3
Provision of auxiliary equipment	3
Adapted transportation for people with reduced mobility	3
Assistants, escorts, social and other service providers for people with reduced mobility	3
Sports clubs, halls adjusted for PWDs	3
State support programs growth for the socially vulnerable groups of PWDs	3
Education, courses and professional trainings	2
Banisters at the stairs of the buildings	2
Provision of prosthetic and orthopedic devices in the regions	1
Facilities for walks in public places in winter time	1
Availability of rehabilitation programs	1
Legal advice/consulting	1
Increasing the number of minibuses/transportation in the regions	1
Availability of qualified prosthetics specialists	1
Availability of public toilets in the city	1
Online queuing system in medical institutions	1
Provision of an apartment or accommodation	1
Provision of medicine	1
Playgrounds	1
Electric wheelchair	1
Tax and economic benefits for entrepreneurs with disabilities	1
Rehabilitation services	1
Accessible ATMs	1
Sign language translation, simultaneous flashing signals	1

Table 1. Urgent needs of respondents

The participation in public life



Graph 10. Turnout of respondents in the elections.



Graph 11. The existing conditions for PWDs provided to ensure the secrecy of voting during the nationwide and local elections

According to the respondents, they often do not even participate in decision making processes even in their families, have communication issues with employers and face multiple discrimination in almost all spheres of life, i.e. education, work, family, friends, etc. Because of their disability, PWDs often face humiliation, ridicule, isolation, indignity, neglect, etc.

“People make fun of me. The law should be changed for PWDs, when seeing someone who has a crooked eye or has a defect, people forget that the person with the disability is conscious and understands everything. It would be better if the law defines a punishment for those who make fun of PWDs.”

In terms of the physical environment, the majority of respondents find that Yerevan is still inaccessible and not adjusted to the needs of PWDs. In comparison with the capital, the regional cities and communities are more inaccessible. On the other hand, some of the respondents notice positive changes in the attitude of the society compared to recent years. In other words, the society treats PWDs differently, who in turn have changed their attitude towards their own life. In recent years, according to young respondents, PWDs have become more active in universities and in educational institutions, which bring positive changes in the labor market. However some respondents who deny the existence of pronounced discrimination against PWDs in the labor market are convinced that the vast majority of PWDs are unable to find any job due to the lack of skills and education. It means the issues are mostly determined by the low quality of education and the absence of skills.

In addition, one of the aims of our study was to understand the extent to which PWDs have an access to the decision-making processes in important political and socio-economic issues of the country, which is one of the important criteria for ensuring a non-discriminatory and inclusive environment. As can be seen from Graph 12, almost half of the respondents took part in the local elections as a voter. Moreover, there is no significant difference between the participation of men and women. It is worth mentioning that 78% of those who did not participate in the elections were from urban areas, i.e. the political participation of PWDs from rural areas is significantly higher.

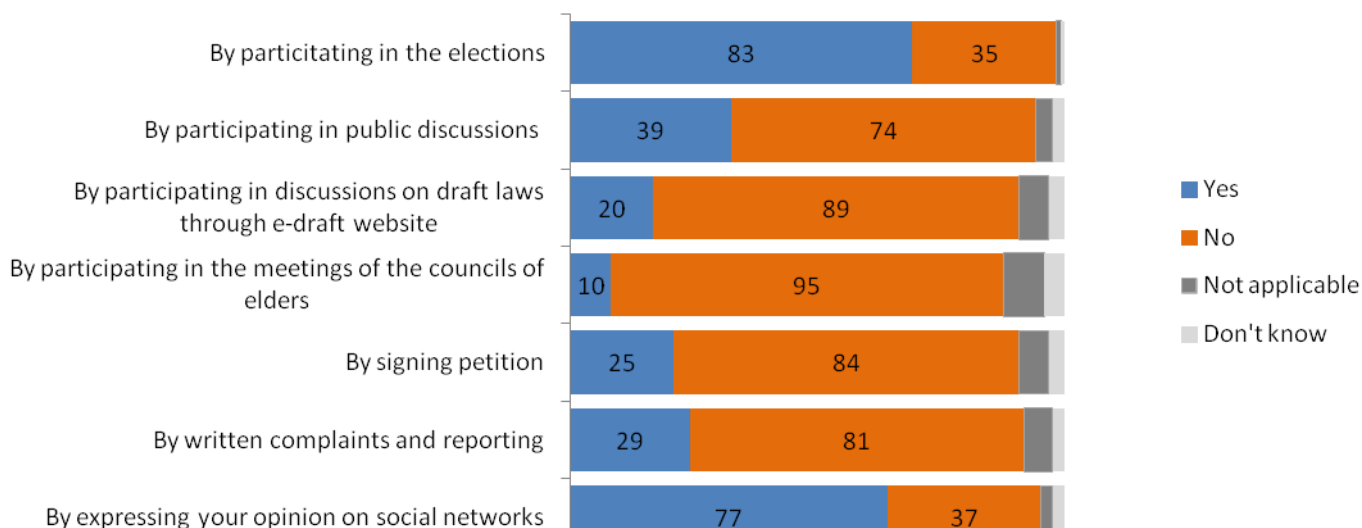
During the latest national elections, a number of CSO representatives developed methodological guidelines on how to organize the voting process and ensure the secrecy of the ballot for PWDs.

However, the annual Report on the activities of the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia and the situation of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in 2018 and 2019, points out in details at the gaps of Electoral Code as well as the issues concerning the organization of the elections. Thus, in the 2018 elections, the main violations of PWDs' voting rights were identified by several CSOs, where the Agate NGO played a significant role. The main violations revealed by the Agate NGO during the 2018 parliamentary elections within the framework of the "Elections for All" program were related to the inaccessibility of polling stations for PWDs.

“6% of the observed polling stations had no need for an entrance ramp; however, people in wheelchairs encountered difficulties while exercising the right to vote, in 10% of the polling stations, the voting room was located on the second floor or in the basement where no elevators exist. The monitors also noted the inaccessibility of toilet facilities. Moreover, most polling stations did not have magnifying glasses for people with visual impairment, and in some polling stations, PWDs found it difficult to vote on their own due to insufficient lighting. At the same time, in some polling stations, ballot boxes were placed too close to the wall preventing wheelchair users from voting independently.”

Thus, as can be seen from Graph 11, some of the respondents (37%) believe that not all of the measures have been implemented to ensure the secrecy of the ballot during the elections, and the rest of the respondents couldn't answer that question at all (27%).

Are you involved in decision-making processes by the following means?



Graph 12. The participation of respondents in decision making processes (person)

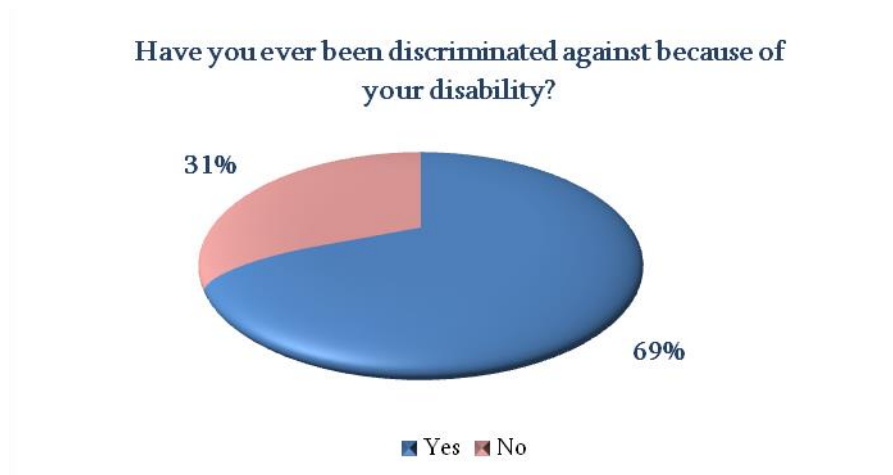
Graph 12 shows that the respondents have the most active participation in the decision-making process of the country through elections. 69% of respondents or 83 people answered this way. Then, the activity of participation in decision-making emerges through the expression of opinions on social networks, which was mentioned by 64% of respondents or 77 people. On the other hand, respondents are the least involved in the meetings of the Council of Elders. 79% or 95 people stated that they do not participate in the meetings of the Council of Elders. 74% or 89 people stated they do not participate in online law discussions, 70% or 84 people do not participate in petitions, 68% or 81 people do not file complaints and 62% or 74 people do not participate in public discussions at all.

The manifestations of discrimination on the grounds of disability

The main purpose of the study was to understand what forms of discrimination PWDs have ever encountered. Since the questionnaire contains open-ended questions, it makes it possible to understand where the discrimination has mainly observed and how.

The study revealed that disability discrimination starts from the family, then it may emerge in the interactions with other social institutions. It might occur during education, economic activity, medical care, and in various lifelong circumstances of PWDs.

“Discrimination manifests differently. Starting, if you could walk, you will study, but now 9 years of education is enough for you. That's why now I can neither continue my education nor find a good job. They changed the entrance of our house without considering that I might not be able to leave the house at all, or go to work, And even if I find a job, I have to find something online and/or distant so that no one has to take me to the workplace. Someone called me for work, asked for money to buy a tablet, cheated, and it turned into an issue and I caused shame for my family. They are convinced we should not work. Roughly speaking, live until you die. What goals, what issues? Before the pandemic I accepted the invitation from the Ministry of Emergency Situations, they did not let me go, nor did they take my application. It got lost. And now I belong to a vulnerable group because of the pandemic, and they reject me. When needed they say you do not help in this house, I do not exist for them, what I may know about working, etc. So living in a family does not change anything. You stay alone with your issues and your health, there is no time. Fortunately, my sister lives in the city. I go to seminars with my finances, if it is enough for my transportation. Whatever right the state gives, it must have users.”

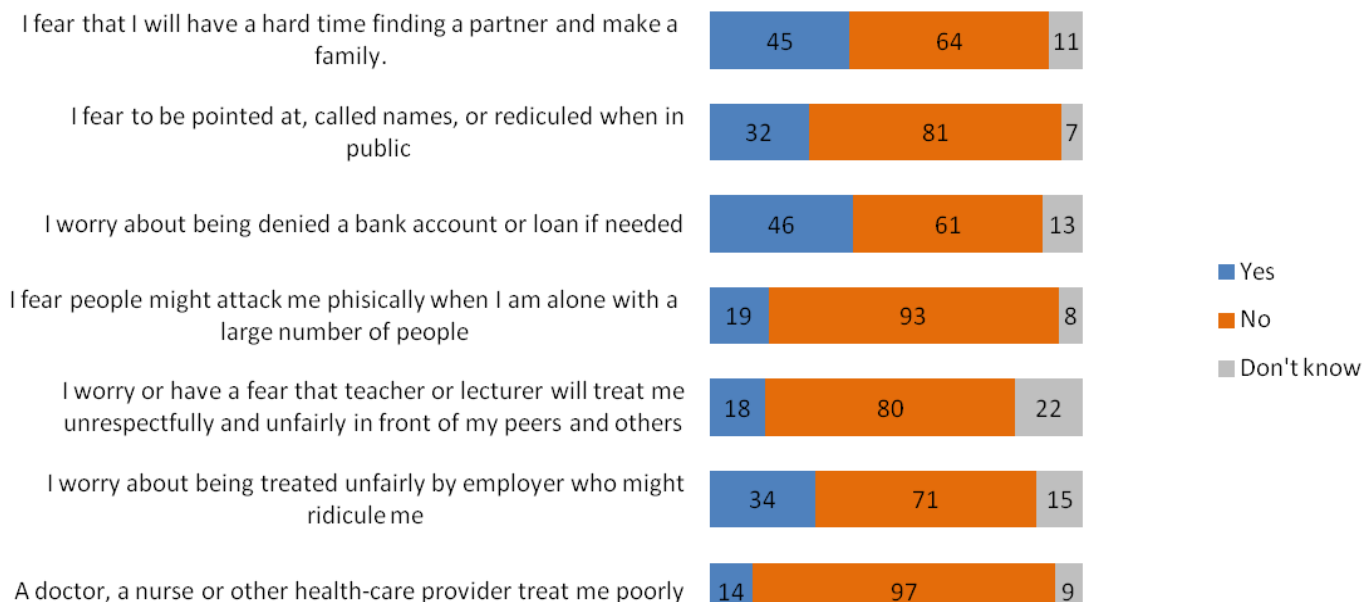


Graph 13. Cases of discrimination against respondents

Graph 13 shows that the vast majority of respondents, 69%, have ever experienced discrimination. In the meantime, 58% of the respondents who have been ever discriminated against are mainly those with movement disorders, 31% have 1st group, 29% - 2nd, and 27% have 3rd group of disability. 38% of respondents who faced discrimination are men and 62% are women. That is, women are about 1.5 times more likely to be discriminated against. No other specific manifestations were expressed by type of residence, education or age.

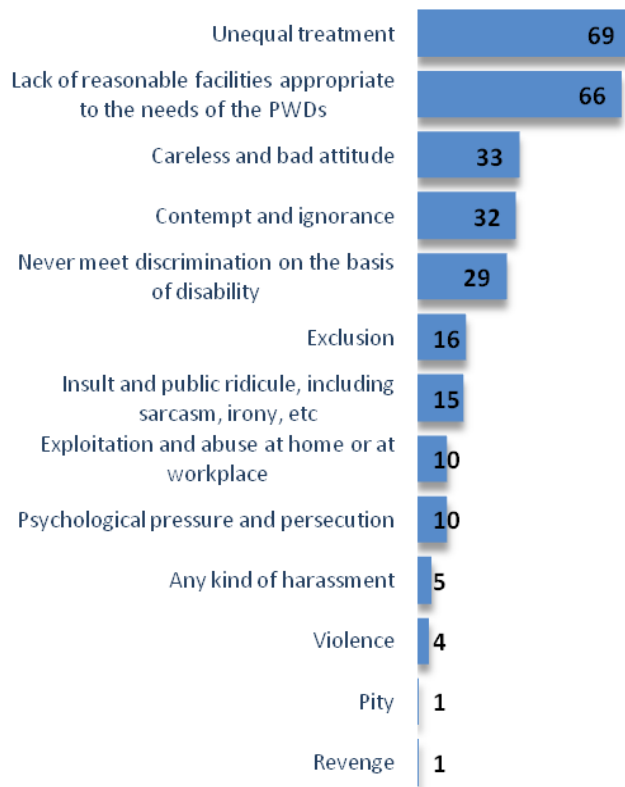
Graph 14 shows that because of their disabilities, respondents are concerned about earning money and making a family in the future. Thus, 46 of the respondents, due to their disability, have fears that if needed, they might be refused to obtain a loan (credit sale). Then, 45 of the respondents have concerns they will not find a partner and make a family. 32 respondents have fears that they might be pointed at, called names, or bullied when in public, another 34 are worried about being ridiculed and treated unfairly by the employer, etc. And very few respondents have fears to be mistreated by a caregiver or nurse. Similarly, the probability of discrimination in educational institutions is low. Perhaps the reason is the positive impact of inclusive education implemented in recent years. The results of our study show that the fear of meeting violence is not high among respondents as well. Only 19 indicated that they have fears of physical attacks when being in crowded places.

Because of my disability...



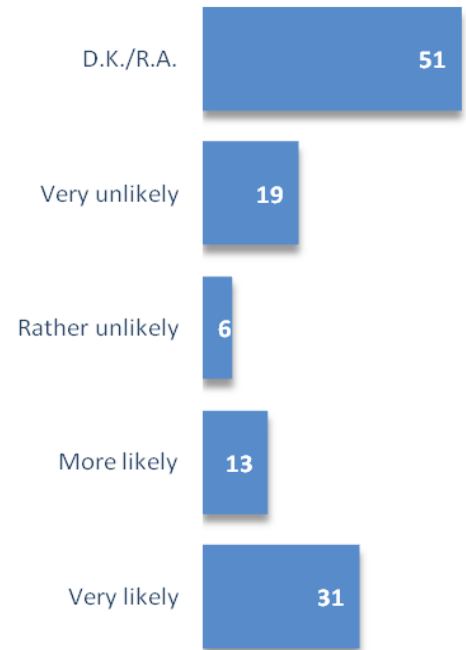
Graph 14. Manifestations of discrimination on the grounds of disability

Which of the following forms of discrimination have you encountered on the basis of your disability?



Graph 15. Frequency of various forms of discrimination on the basis of disability

How likely you would face discrimination if you were of the opposite sex?



Graph 16. Discrimination on the ground of gender

Graph 15 shows that the vast majority of respondents have experienced unequal treatment, lack of reasonable facilities, or poor treatment during their life. It is also apparent from this question that cases of violence on the grounds of disability are very rare. A quarter of respondents said they had never been discriminated against. On the other hand, the next graph shows that there can be cases of double discrimination based on gender. It should be noted that the majority of respondents (65%) who think they would be more likely to meet discrimination if they were of the opposite sex are women.

“People’s attitudes are overwhelming. Inclusive education will change a lot, but the older generation is too rigid to treat people with disabilities differently. Their prejudices are very disturbing, although there is a slight change.”

Graph 17 shows that the majority of respondents, 80 PWDs, mentioned more frequently that when facing discrimination they try to solve the problem on their own without turning to anyone.

How do you act when you face discrimination on the basis of disability?

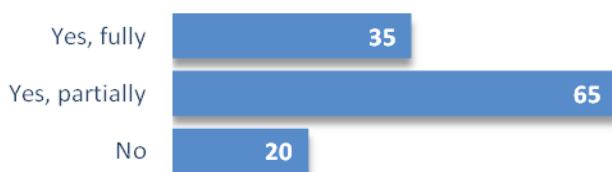


Graph 17. Actions taken when facing discrimination on the ground of disability

In the meantime, women (57%) have mentioned more frequently they tend to solve their problems on their own without any intervention.

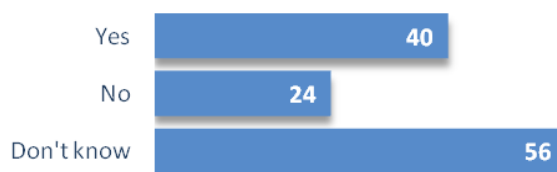
"I always try to do everything on my own so I won't be embarrassed in society."

Do you know how to protect your rights when facing discrimination?



Graph 18. Respondents' capability to defend their rights when facing discrimination

Can you and your family members receive the necessary protection and assistance when facing discrimination?

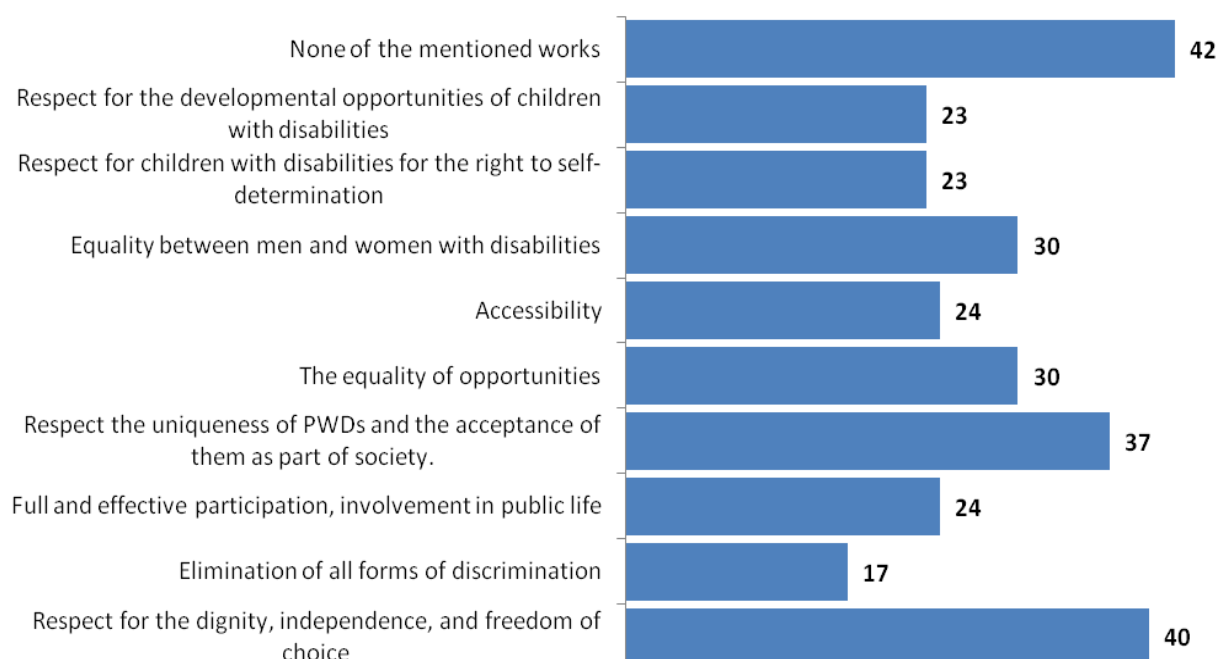


Graph 19. Opportunities for assistance when facing discrimination

Thus, Graph 18 indicates that many respondents can partially defend their rights if they face discrimination. In the same way (Graph 19), though many respondents are convinced that they can get the protection and support if necessary, the number of those who hesitate whether they or their family members can obtain support and/or protection prevail. Additionally, it is not only about independence but also about the lack of effective mechanisms and necessary information.

"My hope is always on me, the state is powerless to do anything, they just ignore everything. There aren't any need assessment procedures, the state only gives me a pension, helps with prosthetics, in other cases, it takes 0 actions. I am ignored in any issue of social assistance, there is no discount on fees and taxes. If I have achieved anything in my life, it is only due to my diligence, perseverance, and my friends. The state only writes laws that remain on paper and does not follow them. I dream of having a European approach to PWDs in Armenia."

What are the principles of ensuring a non-discriminatory environment in Armenia?



Graph 20. The current principles of ensuring a non-discriminatory environment in Armenia

Graph 20 shows the respondents' opinion on the viability of the principles of ensuring a non-discriminatory environment in Armenia. Thus, the majority (42) believe that none of the listed principles works. And 1/3 of the respondents think that there is "Respect for the dignity, independence and the freedom of choice" in the country. Next, the principle of "Respect for the uniqueness of people with disabilities" is considered to be viable for respondents. Few (17) believe that the principle of "elimination of any kind of discrimination" applies in the country. It means that the principle of elimination of various forms of discrimination is not ensured both at the public and state levels.

The following table shows what respondents feel when facing discrimination.

Feelings	Frequencies
Insult	11
Anger, irritation	7
The desire to fight for my and others full life	6
Disgust	5
Sadness, chagrin	5
Depression, anxiety, frustration	5
Pain	3
Disappointment, despair	5
Injustice	2
Neglect, helplessness, contempt	2
Fear	2
Humiliation	1
It's an unpleasant feeling, that reminds you are not like everyone else	1
Indifference	1
"Absence of weapons"	1

Table 2. Respondents' feelings when facing discrimination

We present the information received from the qualitative interviews without any comment.

"I was very constrained at school because of the discriminatory attitude of teachers. I remember a situation when I had to stand in line with my schoolmates and the teacher took me out since I have dwarfism."

"If they see a person with a cane, they will not hire him/her. The self-realization in my country is very important for me. I have a problem with training at the moment: due to the lack of skills, they do not help you move forward as a beginner. They say you can't work with a cane as a cashier. Employers are looking for a

nice appearance, cunning, light-hearted person that's why I can not find a job. I was not given the opportunity but I could start the work in a few days of practice."

"Even in the neighborhood, there is unequal treatment. Something had gone wrong in the building, they said your child had done it. I explained that my child can hardly see with one eye, how could he have been responsible for it."

"When facing any obstacle, I try to be more positive. I think that the time will come soon to solve these problems because there is no formed consciousness and resources in Armenian communities yet."

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents



43%



57%

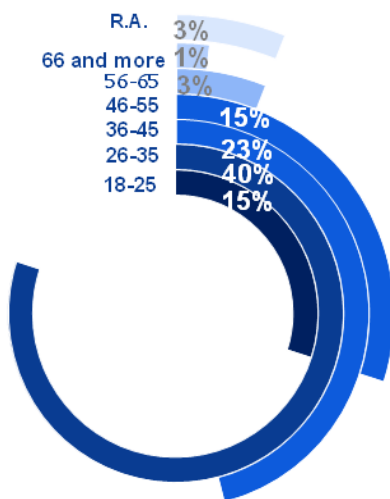
33%

77%

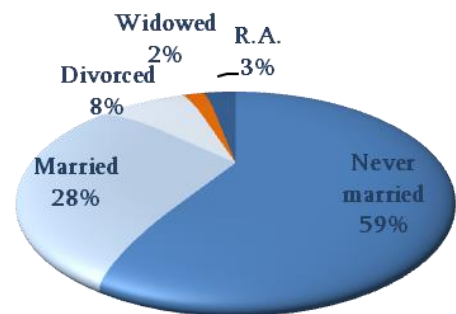
■ Rural

■ Urban

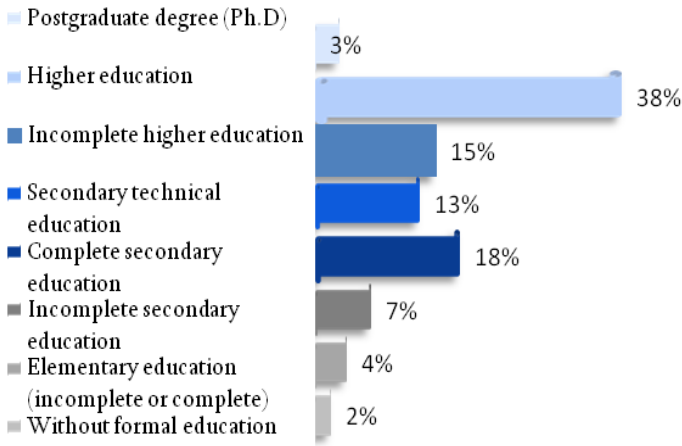
AGE



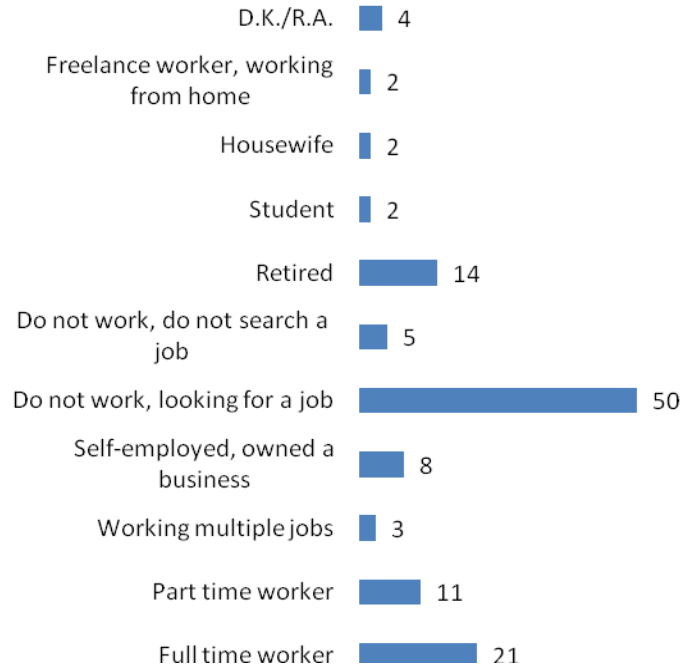
Marital status:



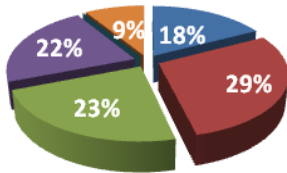
Education



Employment status

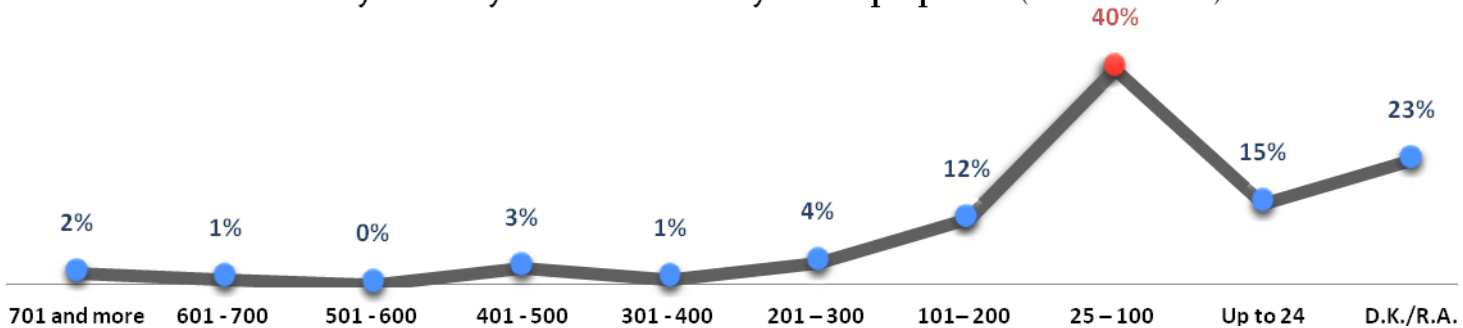


Socioeconomic status of the family



- Money is not enough even for food
- Money is enough for food only, but not for clothes
- Money is enough for food and clothes, but not enough for expensive equipment like a refrigerator or washing machine.
- We can afford to buy expensive things like equipment, car, can go to the rest, but can't buy a house/apartment
- We can afford to buy anything we need
- D.K./R.A.

What is your family's household monthly income per person? (thousand dram)



Suggestions and conclusions

- To increase state programs for addressing the employment problems of PWDs.
- To ensure the accessibility of the environment for all PWDs, including the creation of a barrier-free environment for the free movement of people with reduced mobility and for their participation in the public life. To exclude the issues such as the non-compliance of the majority of ramps to the existing standards, one-way traffic lights with sound signals at crossroads (for example, a blind person can cross one side and not the other) etc.
- To promote the involvement of PWDs in the society through tangible, active steps: this is an effective way to eliminate or reduce discrimination.
- Gradually, according to prepared schedule and action plan, ensure real physical accessibility of educational institutions (flat entrances or ramps, elevators, toilet facilities, etc.). Schools and universities are very inconvenient for the respondents.
- To create accessible facilities for the customers in service centers of Haypost: excluding the problems of high tables, inaccessibility of entrances, barriers of the environment, etc. This is especially actual since many elderly people and PWDs receive their pensions from Haypost.
- Adjust the bank's equipment, ATMs, and buildings for PWDs.
"ATMs are very high. Because of the building conditions, you are in the spotlight. Banks' equipment is so high that you have to stretch. Only half of them are adapted".
- To recruit PWDs in state agencies following the example of the Ministry of Emergency Situations. That is, to introduce a quota system for staffing by involving PWDs.
"We are mainly hired through acquaintances. It is not known why I could not find a job, but I was mainly not hired because of my disability. If we are hired in state institutions, it will become an example for many."
- Additional supportive measures or incentives are needed to ensure equal opportunities for PWDs.
"That's why you go to the employer, they say there are equal opportunities, I choose the healthy one and it is equal. Also, no one can put pressure on the private sector. If we are not given a place in state entities, the private sector cannot be forced or coerced".
- To expand the number of inclusive programs and increase state attention to the problems of PWDs. To assist in the organization of leisure, health and social services.
"Any disabled person, if he is employed and has the opportunity to leave home, especially to go to the theater, he will put pressure on the society. He will create himself both leisure and anything else. But the approach must be state-based so that others could strive for it."
- To increase public awareness of the needs and situation of people with disabilities through social advertisements and various campaigns.
"Public awareness needs to be raised. It comes from a lack of experience and a person who has been discriminated against several times should not be constrained but should think about what actions he/she can take. I am not saying this for myself, but I am talking about people who are rigid and who do not defend their rights. They can apply to various human rights organizations, they just have to take responsibility for themselves."
- To organize courses related to the independent and full life of PWDs among parents, employers, and other members of society.
"There should be trainings for PWDs, especially among people living in villages, because no one cares how people live in the villages."
- To establish state control over the cases of exploitation and abuse of PWDs in the labor market. Take measures for identifying and setting such employers' accountability.
- To raise the legal awareness of PWDs.
"Vulnerable groups will be more involved in awareness-raising courses. There should be more programs where PWDs could have a chance to express themselves freely, know where to apply and how to defend their rights."
- Institutional reforms are needed to improve PWDs' quality of life, to protect their rights, and to increase social activism.
"In my opinion, discrimination occurs when PWDs do not realize their rights and do not act differently."
- To take into account PWDs' opinions when making decisions in local government entities.
"The type of disability is important for decision making, especially when it comes to mental disorders. There are families where PWDs do not participate in decision-making. "There are opportunities in Armenia to participate in decision-making, but the opinion of people with disabilities is not always accepted."

- To ease the involvement of PWDs in the educational system by eliminating the difficulties of PWDs to travel and use vehicles. In that case, more motivated and educated people will be involved in educational and political processes.
“PWDs have problems with education, as there are difficulties for their movement in public spaces. If they are provided with transportation, public attitudes towards them will be changed globally.”
- To involve employers in state programs and create benefits for long-term employment of PWDs.
“The most important thing for me is the availability of education and the changes of competitiveness in the labor market. It is necessary to create facilities in the public space, to regulate the issues related to salary and work-schedule.”
- To create opportunities for PWDs for being appointed in state positions.
“For example, PWDs cannot work in law enforcement agencies. There are other social issues, for example, in my opinion, it is more relevant not to provide state pensions to PWDs, but to create opportunities to work and earn money.”