

Disability Monitor Initiative Journal for South East Europe

The focus of this issue:

The UN Convention on the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities



UN Ad Hoc Committee session, New York

The idea of an international convention on the rights of people with disabilities is not new. Many initiatives towards a convention on the rights of people with disabilities have been held but failed due to a lack of support from governments; with the underlying assumption that the existing human rights documents provide enough legal protection to persons with disabilities. A concrete step was finally made on December 19, 2001. Upon Mexico's initiative, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution for the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to consider proposals for a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.

This is the successful result of many years of advocacy by the disability movement for the inclusion of disability in the UN human rights legal framework. The first initiatives were taken by Italy in 1987 and Sweden in 1988 at the UN General Assembly, but as mentioned above, with no success.

As major outcome of the Decade of Disabled people is the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the UN Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for People with Disabilities in 1993. Even though they are not legally binding, meaning that states are not obliged to implement them, they proved to be very useful as guidelines in policymaking in different countries.

In March 2000, leading international NGOs attending the World NGO Summit on Disability in Beijing produced the Beijing Declaration on the Rights of People with Disabilities in the New Century, which call on all governments to support a convention.

In April 2000, the High Commission on Human rights supported the argument for a specific convention as underpinning, and not undermining, the existing human rights treaties.

*Handicap International team in South East Europe
wishes you a successful year in 2006*

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INTERVIEW WITH DAMJAN TATIC,
Lawyer, member of the Center for Independent Living of Serbia and state representative in the UN Ad Hoc Committee

HOW TO USE THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS
A case study: the Convention on the rights of the Child

MAKE THE LEGISLATION WORK
- by Kapka Panayotova from Centre for Independent Living Bulgaria

And also

FROM AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION TO CHANGING NATIONAL DISABILITY POLICY
- an interview with Zvonko Savreski, president of PolioPlus

BEYOND DE-INSTITUTIONALIZATION:
The Unsteady Transition towards an Enabling System in South East Europe

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INTERVIEW WITH DAMJAN TATIC

Lawyer, member of the Center for Independent Living Serbia and state representative for Serbia and Montenegro at the UN Ad Hoc Committee

Who participates in the work of the convention?

There are the governments who will sign and ratify the Convention once it's adopted by various UN institutions, national human rights bodies, the civic sector, and, most significantly by organizations of people with disabilities, but also other organizations that deal with disability issues.

How is the work organized?

It's organized in sessions called Ad Hoc Committees. So far, there have been 6 sessions of the Ad Hoc Committee. After the second Ad Hoc Committee meeting in 2003, an expert working group was formed to develop the various proposals put forth by the states parties on the draft convention. The idea of the working group was to find a common ground in all of the proposals and produce a text that would be used as the basis for further negotiations. The working group was composed of experts from around 30 countries and approximately a dozen NGOs and representatives of national human rights institutions. The Ad Hoc Committee is divided in two parts: informal and plenary sessions. During the informal sessions, only state delegations can speak but NGOs are permitted to be present. NGOs can intervene in the informal session but only after the states parties have finished their deliberations.



Damjan Tatic at the 6th Ad Hoc Committee session

Regarding the time frame for the draft Convention, the negotiation process should be finished in 2006 but the work might be extended since there are still many crucial issues to be clarified. Decisions such as the one on legal capacity still have to be taken. I fear that this issue, as well as some other controversial issues like the issue of married life and family, or sexuality, will create a delay.

What is the process for NGO participation?

In the formals, NGOs can make their presentations, organize panels to which they can invite state delegations, and submit written proposals. Usually the International Disability Caucus (described on page 3) and various international organizations present position papers on different draft articles. Additionally, there are bilateral and multilateral lobbying processes initiated by formal contacts with the state delegations.

How do the leaders of disability organizations participate in the process?

Leaders in the disability movement organized themselves mainly by forming the International Disability Caucus (IDC), a group made up of over 50 DPOs and NGOs from around the world with the aim of lobbying states parties with a united voice. Some of the IDC members divide into small working groups by article according to their specific field of expertise and they develop strategies for lobbying state parties on the specific issues. Of course, if there are several articles or issues that are significant to a group they can speak on more than one occasion in the formal plenary sessions. For example, people with sensory disabilities were keen on the articles regarding access to communication and information, education, accessibility and also the article on participation in cultural life. In addition, at the last Ad Hoc session, there were approximately 110 states parties and at least half of them had persons with disabilities in their delegation. In some countries, these people are government officials such as Thailand. In others, like Serbia and Montenegro, one of the representatives of the movement of persons with disabilities who is also a legal expert, was invited by the government to be a part of the delegation.

How did you get the support of the state and how did you become their representative?

In 2001, the Centre for Independent Living (CIL) Serbia got the information from international organizations of people with disabilities regarding the Mexican initiative to establish an international convention on the rights of people with disabilities. CIL informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and convinced him that the government should support this process as it is the most significant and key human rights instrument that is being discussed in the UN currently. Fortunately, the government of Serbia and Montenegro recognized the significance of this issue. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was very honest about the fact that they didn't have sufficient information about disability issues and asked me if I would like to be a part of the convention process and I said yes.

How did your participation influence the document?

First, my duty was to bring all the disability issues closer to the government representatives and it was easy in the sense that they are already in favor of the social model for disability. In the working group, many people were either diplomats who didn't know much about disability, or people from the disability movement who didn't know much about the process of adopting an international convention. I knew both sides of the coin, thanks to my degree in international public law, so I was always trying to help them reach a common ground. Sometimes states or NGOs can be wrapped up in their own formulations and try to push for them too hard. That was one of the reasons why I was invited last year by the Chairman

of the Ad Hoc Committee to consider whether I would like to facilitate one of the draft articles. I agreed to be the facilitator in 2005 for article 19 on accessibility.

Besides facilitating during the plenary session, I organized an informal meeting with about a dozen state delegations and 3 or 4 NGOs to hear their ideas on article 19 and try to bring them together. There is always a dilemma: do you want a perfect convention that only a few states would ratify or do you want one that makes compromises between the different actors but will be ratified by many states? One has to make a balance and it isn't always easy. You shouldn't go below some standards, but try to find what is acceptable for most people.

What is the International Disability Caucus?

The International Disability Caucus is made up of over 50 DPOs and NGOs from around the world that came together at the second Ad Hoc Committee meeting to form a united group in order to lobby states during the convention process. The main principle of the IDC is to lobby with one voice showing unanimity on all issues that are argued in the name of the IDC. The second principle that binds the IDC is the statement: "Nothing about us without us" and they conclude all interventions with this phrase. The idea of the IDC is to join many voices together to show solidarity on critical issues in order to lobby more effectively. The IDC has grown tremendously through the Ad Hoc Committee meetings and shows much greater solidarity as well as strength. States parties as well as international organizations recognize IDC statements and they have succeeded in changing many key issues within the draft text of the convention.

What is the possibility of influence of the International Disability Caucus?

It depends of the strength of their lobbying. In my personal experience, first there were really quite a lot of declaratory political speeches, but now, since the majority of the organizations have really good legal experts, their presentations and their lobbying efforts are more focused and they are giving concrete proposals, reacting on governments' proposals, they praise and support the ones that are acceptable for them and speak out when they are completely unacceptable. But also, indirectly, it is up to each national coordination body, coalition of DPOs in each country, to lobby their government and to establish contacts with them and to try to influence.

What is the difference between the UN Standard Rules and the UN Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities?

The UN General Assembly adopted the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities by consensus as a document that would set moral and political responsibilities for member states but they are not legally obliged to implement them. However, many legal experts including the Special Rapporteur on disability interpret the UN Standard Rules as part of international customary law, as over 40 countries have adopted legislation aimed at implementing the various rules. However, these rules are primarily guidelines for states on which measures to adopt in order to ensure equal conditions for the full participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of society, and they are not legally binding. By contrast, once signed and ratified by the states parties, the UN Convention will be a legally binding agreement. Once it is ratified it will automatically become a part of the internal legal systems of the states which sign it. Furthermore, the UN Standard Rules primarily cover economic, social and cultural rights of persons with disabilities, On the contrary, the draft Convention covers economic, social and cultural, as well as political and civic rights and freedoms.

What will be the impact of the UN Convention?

It will definitely be a huge step forward and we hope that many states will sign and ratify it. Ratification is only the first step and then there is the implementation process. In some countries it will imply a more profound change of policy: it will involve a change of legislation and it will enable people with disabilities and their representative organizations to get more directly involved as partners with their government in the implementation process. Also, there are other things like the whole concept of universal design. It has to be directed in a way as to make society more inclusive. People with disabilities have all the rights that are guaranteed by the current human rights instruments but despite this fact, many states face obstacles that have to be removed to guaranteeing these rights such as inaccessibility. However, people have to be aware that it is not something that will happen overnight

How will the Convention be implemented?

It will be defined by the final transitional clauses. I know that there's still the discussion about the monitoring mechanisms which are very important and with them the states will at least have the obligation to submit reports in a defined timeframe to the body that will be set up or we will use the existing human rights monitoring mechanisms. It is still to be defined. There will definitely be a reporting procedure and it will in a way set the timeframe. But we still have to see how much the states will have to do in the respect of accountability.

For the moment, I think it is very important to make this process as transparent as possible in the region, so that people here know what the work on the convention is about and that we should continue to cooperate with the government.

HOW TO USE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

MAKE THE LEGISLATION WORK

By Kapka Panayotova from Centre for Independent Living Bulgaria

What is Agenda 22 about? It is not a 22nd Century Manifesto. It is not a Catch 22 story at least it was not supposed to be so. It is an implementation tool for the Twenty Two UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. It has been developed for one simple reason: to be a guide for implementation of the rules - no policy document whatsoever can work without an implementation plan; an obvious statement usually disliked by the policy makers who would prefer to have their job done by passing a law, a by-law, a strategy paper or a programme.

Agenda 22 is an instrument to make policy decisions implemented in the interest of their beneficiaries, in this particular case in the interest of people with disabilities and their rights. It is based on the values of human rights, the principles of the UN Standard Rules and the nature of public policies in general. It is also a framework that helps people with disabilities and their organisations to participate in the policy process as equal partners to the authorities. Initially Agenda 22 was developed to help local authorities plan, implement, monitor and evaluate disability oriented measures. As a matter of fact it is quite applicable on national level as well; however the scale of operations is different.

How does Agenda 22 work?

It is recommended to start with an inventory of the current disability policies. This is a process aimed at reviewing the existing situation in terms of policy documents (laws, regulations, strategies, plans, specific practices, etc.), institutions in charge of their implementation, budgets. Since the human rights approach to disability is quite new, in most of the cases (all around the world) it is found out that current policies are exclusive and discriminatory, they are packed into the responsibilities of the health or social authorities, and they do absorb a lot of money by distributing peanuts among a lot of people without any integration or development impact.

A CASE STUDY: THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The adoption of a legal instrument in favour of children's rights was also a long process. It is after ten years of drafting and negotiations that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was unanimously adopted by the UN General Assembly in November 1989. The CRC has become one of the most widely accepted international treaties. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty that recognizes the human rights of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18 years. In 41 articles, it establishes in international law that states parties must ensure that all children, without discrimination of any form, benefit from special protection measures and assistance; have access to services such as education and health care; can develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential; grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding; and are informed about and participate in, achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner. Major NGOs working for the rights of children have incorporated the principles of the convention into their programmes, becoming more than just a reference, but a systematic guide for work. It provides them with guidance in areas that need to be assessed and addressed and is also a tool to measure progress achieved in these areas. The CRC has been especially important for mainstreaming children's rights in a systematic manner into the human rights movement and the majority of human rights organisations have integrated the principles and provisions of the convention into their activities.

Upon the convention's ratification, a country becomes a state party to the Convention and is obliged to review its national law to ensure full compliance with the articles of the Convention. Governments are required to report periodically to a committee of independent experts on their progress to achieve all the rights. Therefore through these reports, governments are urged to use the convention as a guide in policy-making and implementation such as to develop a national agenda for children.

The CRC has made significant progress in the protection of children's rights than before its ratification. Mostly, it has encouraged states to ratify other fundamental human rights instruments and more and more governments are committed to honouring and implementing human rights agendas by establishing National Plans of Action, including specific targets on the basis of which progress can be monitored.

In general terms, major achievements have been made in the field of children's rights with the help of the CRC. Special institutions, structures, agendas and measures for promoting child rights have emerged. NGOs and other actors in civil society have materialized as innovative and powerful voices for children's rights.

The next step is to convince the political establishments that this situation isn't just. Nowadays it isn't as difficult as it was two decades ago. So being convinced that a change is needed the government will agree to setting up a Coordination Group (CG) to guide the change in the policy perspective. This body should be composed of all stakeholders on the ground, with the majority being people with disabilities and their organizations, representing different impairments, and given political legitimacy by the respective authority (Municipal Council or the Mayor on local level, or a national authority engaged in the disability policy change). It is important to have an official decision that spells out the 'powers' of the CG and its role in the policy process to suggest measures, to consult budgets, to monitor the results, to evaluate the impact and further suggest improvements in all policy areas, if inclusion and mainstreaming are to become a reality; in other words, to participate in the whole policy cycle. In order to be effective the CG should also be given an office (not a big one, preferably within the authority in charge) and allocated a small budget for one person's salary and minor operational costs.

Then the real work starts with setting up working groups on different policy issues, like education, employment, transport, community services, etc - as it goes in the Standard Rules, but within agreed priorities on the ground. These are supposed to suggest feasible policy measures including objectives, activities, implementation frames and estimated budgets. Via the CG, their results enter the official authorities who have the power of decision making. All of this content type of work should be funded with public resources and performed with high quality professional standards. Only then the policy argument can be sound. Otherwise, policies will continue to be based on traditional concepts, pity and poverty assumptions give money for (rather than to) people with disabilities and keep it as it is. Even worse they will be justified with keeping the participation of people with disabilities at the level it currently is.

Then comes implementation, which should be monitored by DPOs and the results should be fed back to the working groups and the CG. This is to ensure that objectives are met and if not, why. Finding out why some measures do not work out is crucial for the whole policy process wrong action doesn't help anyone and uses a lot of money. The sooner it is stopped, the better it is for the community and the public at large. Hence, accuracy in monitoring is essential with the only purpose to make things better the next time, not in 50 years from now.

As could be clearly seen, being a part of the policy process is a huge responsibility passed over to people with disabilities. If this is what we want, we have to be prepared to bear it! If we are not prepared yet, better to leave it or get prepared as soon as possible!

Where the convention process is currently

For the up-coming Ad Hoc Committee meeting, the states parties will enter into the negotiation phase. They have finished the second reading of the draft text and the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee has written a chair text on all of the articles incorporating the views of both governments and NGOs which will be used as the base for negotiation. The negotiations should finish by the end of 2006 with the signing of the convention and then states parties will begin the ratification process.

Chair's text

- Article 1- Purpose
- Article 2 - Definitions
- Article 3 - General principles
- Article 4 - General obligations
- Article 5 - Equality and non-discrimination
- Article 6 - Women with disabilities
- Article 7 - Children with disabilities
- Article 8 - Raising awareness regarding disability
- Article 9 - Accessibility
- Article 10 - Right to life
- Article 11 - Situations of risk
- Article 12 - Equal recognition as a person before the law
- Article 13 - Access to justice
- Article 14 - Liberty and security of the person
- Article 15 - Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Article 16 - Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse
- Draft article 17 - Protecting the integrity of the person
- Article 18 - Liberty of movement
- Article 19 - Living independently and being included in the community
- Article 20 - Personal mobility
- Article 21 - Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information
- Article 22 - Respect for privacy
- Article 23 - Respect for the home and the family
- Article 24 - Education
- Article 25 - Health
- Article 26 - Habilitation and rehabilitation
- Article 27 - Work and employment
- Article 28 - Adequate standard of living and social protection
- Article 29 - Participation in political and public life
- Article 30 - Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport
- Article 31 - Statistics and data collection
- Article 32 - International cooperation
- Article 33 - National implementation and monitoring
- Article 34 - International monitoring

Helpful links on the UN convention:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm>

http://www.landminesurvivors.org/what_rights_un.php

FROM AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION TO CHANGING NATIONAL DISABILITY POLICY

- an interview with Zvonko Savreski, president of Polio Plus as he discusses the process of introducing a systematic law on the Protection of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities in Macedonia

What is a systematic law?

A systemic law does not exist as a legal term, but Polio Plus is calling the draft legislation on the Protection of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities systematic because of its level of comprehensiveness. The Systemic Law is a *lex generalis* which is a general law that sets an overall regulation or guideline without regulating specific provisions while a special law or *lex specialis* elaborates or applies the general law with specific measures. A general law yields to the provisions of a particular law but has the legislative power to set changes in legal principles and standards

The law we have drafted is titled « the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities ». It follows the name of the UN Convention. The idea is to bring the new Macedonian legislation into accordance with the principles of the draft convention. Macedonia has a rare opportunity, by adopting his law, to be among the first countries to ratify the convention.

What are the advantages of this law?

Our draft law is very demanding as we have included not only principles, definitions, global creeds, and objects of protection, but we move beyond this. We believe that the answer to the discrimination people with disabilities face in everyday life ought to be an equally strong discrimination, but in this case a positive one.

However, Zvonko Zavrevski said that this law will not present any new demands on any new rights, explaining, “This Law aims to implement the existing rights and standards and to provide that the investments and efforts should yield greater benefits”.

The third chapter of the law contains affirmative state measures and the government’s position. It stipulates precisely what the state should do. We have changed the object of protection. It is now the person, not the person with disabilities, but a person with rights and dignity. Affirmative measures only show the direction in which the government should go pointing out, who is responsible and who has the jurisdiction.

The fourth and fifth parts contain implementation and enforcement mechanisms. There are various mechanisms including; security mechanisms, regulating mechanisms and protective mechanisms. These mechanisms establish commissions for the protection of rights, as well as a monetary fund, which will be automatically deducted from the lottery games. Because the money comes from lotteries, it ensures that the government cannot decide to deny the funds. The term for these commissions is 6 years as opposed to 4 which guarantees that they will not overlap with the mandate of a specific government. We have also established a coordination board with the government on one side, and the non- governmental sector on the other. The seventh chapter of the law contains penal measures. Here we are somewhat rigorous. Well, actually, we are not rigorous; we have only applied the acts stipulated by the criminal statute to the area of discrimination.

Penal measures are up to five years of imprisonment but this is predicted only for very serious criminal acts such as someone from the Ministry who has, without a proper procedure, sent a person for life to an institution where he/she does not belong. The expiration date for acts is also rather long; it can be up to as much as ten years.

Finally, within the draft law, we have included approximately 30 articles of both transitional regulations that will be implemented in the short-term and final rules for the long-term. We have set an extensive time limit for implementation. The longest period should be five years and the shortest time limit is one year. The short-term target refers to the adoption of two fundamental documents that should be brought about by this law; the strategy and the action plan. The strategy refers to the timeframe of six years, and the action plan for every two years. These documents will enable the law to be truly implemented.



The start of the Caravan, Macedonia

Who participated in drafting the systematic law?

In the beginning it was the disability rights inter-parliamentary lobby group who initiated the drafting process. Besides this group, we had the support of various local and international experts. We also distributed several copies of the draft at the Ad Hoc Committee meeting where some of the leaders of the European disability movement had a look at it. The core group consisted of five people that worked non-stop, and the experts were invited according to their specific field of expertise.

The main principle of the systematic law is that the person with his/her rights and dignity are the central focus. A person’s disability is not the focus as it is the society around the person that creates a disabling situation, not the disability itself. Consequently, there is a gap between the person with disabilities and society. In order to bridge this gap, reduce or remove it, positive measures need to be undertaken by the

state. The law stipulates that the Republic has Primary responsibility in ensuring these positive measures are enacted. This includes all types of authorities, not only the executive, but also the legislative branch of the government. It is also important that the measures undertaken are based on the consequence and not the cause of disability meaning that it is not relevant to look at how the disability occurred. Presently there are differences in how the law treats people who were injured at work versus disabled war veterans or persons born with a disability. The main principles of the law include: non-discrimination, equal rights for all, nothing about us without us, prohibition of inter-group discrimination (this that was just mentioned above), as well as prohibition of abusing one's rights.

How will the process proceed?

Our plan, originally, was that the disability rights inter-parliamentary lobby group should submit the law to parliament. However, what happened is that 23 organizations gathered at a SHARE-SEE training in December last year, and the trainer said that citizens in Macedonia had never used the right to propose laws through collecting signatures. Many people at the training realized they could do such an initiative saying, "Come on, we can do this". Afterwards we established a coalition to work on this issue. The inter-parliamentary lobby group was thrilled with the idea as they believed that this should be a civic initiative.

So, if we collect the necessary number of signatures, then the Parliament must include the draft law on the agenda to be voted on within one month. After this, we ask the parliament to issue the law for public debate. We will ask for a 3 month debate, although the period is usually one month. We want to ensure the longest period possible so that the legislation can get greater public attention and, subsequently, more supporters.

We expect the law to be passed, at the latest, by May or June of 2006. If that does not happen, we will withdraw the proposed law, because if it is rejected, we will have to wait for one year before submitting it again.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Work is opposed to this law. They believe that Macedonia has enough laws already and does not need another one. The Ministry of Health and Finance agree with them as this would represent an additional cost for them. On the other hand, the Department for Integrations and the Ministry of Justice support us, as does the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will sponsor the printing and promotion of the UN Convention text and a panel discussion regarding the Macedonian contribution to the work at the Ad Hoc Committee meetings.

What is the expected impact?

The law by itself will not have a big impact but we believe that it contains enough mechanisms to bring about changes that should have an impact in the long-term. In most cases this law does not impact anything directly because it simply says that you have a right to something. However this right should be specified by by-laws or a rule book.

The significance this law has is the implementation of the principle "the power of the people" which is important not only for organizations of people with disabilities but for the entire NGO sector as well.

Nevertheless, we will not stop at this. Instead, we wish to see certain documents adopted such as the strategy and the action plan, as well as the first program for implementation and the first rule book. Finally, all of this energy we had when creating the document should now be focused on the implementation process executing the changes step by step. We know that the first draft text of the law will not be perfect, but it's a start.

What does the campaign for this initiative include?

Our campaign is titled "My signature is the law" and it officially began on November 1st 2005 with the opening of 34 regional offices where citizens are able to sign the petition in support of the new law. The objective was to collect 10,000 signatures of support for the systematic law as well as raise the public's awareness. We created an "aid song" and there will be many nine second video clips. But we know that media are media. They are good in preparing people, but nevertheless, people must be approached through personal contact. As a result, we gathered a caravan to travel through Macedonia. We have a wheelchair marathon runner, Mile Stojkoski from Prilep, who will be touring the entire country talking to people about the law and explaining how important and necessary it is. He already began his journey and will be joined by other people who will go with him for a part of the way completing "mini-marathons" to show their support. After collecting the needed signatures we will do intensive lobbying, and then we will conduct a public debate putting pressure on local and international authorities.



Mile Stojkoski during the Caravan, Macedonia

DISABILITY MONITOR INITIATIVE

The Disability Monitor Initiative (DMI) for South East Europe is an advocacy initiative to gather and disseminate information on relevant disability topics underpinning the move towards full participation and equal opportunities of people with disabilities. The DMI is primarily based on field research consulting with people with disabilities, service providers, members of civil society, government officials and local authorities. The objectives of the DMI are to build up knowledge on the situation of people with disabilities, examine best practices in terms of social innovation happening on the grass-roots level as well as to inform about policy reforms on the national and international levels. The aim is that the DMI will serve as a tool for reporting on critical issues affecting people with disabilities in an effort to support the empowerment of relevant stakeholders with information.

The first Disability Monitor report, *Beyond De-Institutionalisation: The Unsteady Transition towards an Enabling System in South East Europe* is available in print in Albanian, Serbian, and English. To request a copy please contact us at: editor@disabilitymonitor-see.org or to find them in accessible formats visit:

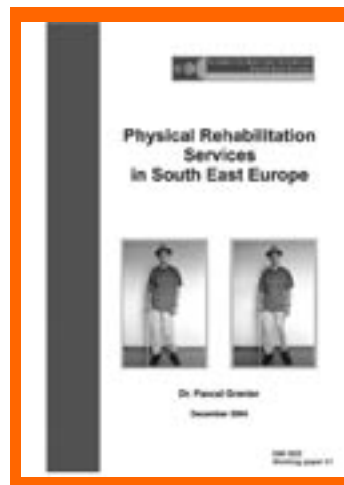
www.disabilitymonitor-see.org.

Beyond De-institutionalisation: The Unsteady Transition towards an Enabling System in South East Europe

This report is based on Handicap International's 12 years of experience in South East Europe supporting people with disabilities and their representative organisations, service providers, policy-makers and local stakeholders in their effort to improve the situation of people with disabilities. It describes the innovative initiatives being undertaken on the grass-roots level in terms of services and reform measures that are needed to ensure equal opportunities and the full participation of people with disabilities.

Physical Rehabilitation Services in South East Europe

This working paper makes an assessment of the physical rehabilitation services that exist in South East Europe providing the reader with a comprehensive overview of the situation in each country as these services are a pre-condition for the full participation of people with disabilities.



THE UPCOMING EVENTS IN THE REGION:

- Disability and Poverty Conference in Albania organized by the World Bank, dates to be confirmed
- International "Access" conference in Serbia and Montenegro organized by the Center for Independent Living Serbia, 20-21 February 2006
- International conference to discuss the Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities in Serbia and Montenegro organized by UN DESA, 20-21 March 2006

For more information please visit the Share-SEE website: www.share-see.org

Editor's note

Within the Disability Monitor Initiative, Handicap International South East Europe created a regional journal to circulate current information on disability issues taking place in the western Balkans and to present the information to all disability stakeholders in an informative way. The newsletter will be printed quarterly and distributed in print and by email in Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian/Bosnian and English. The newsletter will also be available at: www.disabilitymonitor-see.org

For information or comments please contact us at: editor@disabilitymonitor-see.org