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Reuben Escorpizo • Sören Brage • Debra Homa • Gerold Stucki
Editors

Handbook of Vocational Rehabilitation and Disability Evaluation

Application and Implementation of the ICF

Springer

Editors
Reuben Escorpizo
Department of Rehabilitation
and Movement Science
University of Vermont
Burlington, Vermont
USA

Sören Brage
Research Unit
Directorate for Labour and Welfare
Oslo, Oslo
Norway

Debra Homa
Department of Rehabilitation
and Counsel
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, Wisconsin
USA

Gerold Stucki
Department of Health Sciences
and Health Policy
University of Lucerne
Lucerne, Luzern
Switzerland

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Foreword

Promoting the right of persons with disabilities and their full inclusion in all sectors of society on an equal basis with others is a policy goal in many countries around the world, following the entry into force of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in May 2008. The UNCRPD highlights the right of persons with disabilities to access general health, education, habilitation and rehabilitation, and vocational and training services and their right to decent and productive work and employment in the open labour market, on an equal basis with others. Whether their disability dates from birth or an early age, or whether they acquired their disability in the course of their working lives, States that have ratified UNCRPD are required to promote and protect these rights, among others, through a range of measures, including prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability and ensuring reasonable accommodation is made. It is not immediately clear to States what measures will be effective in transforming the vision the UNCRPD represents into a reality for persons with disabilities around the world. It is thus important to draw attention to those that have been tried and tested, examining their impact on health, education, training, and employment outcomes.

For a long time, it was assumed that exclusion or marginalization of persons with disabilities was closely interrelated to, and in fact the unavoidable consequence of, the physical and mental impairments of the persons concerned. It is now increasingly recognized that many of the disadvantages they face leading to their exclusion from employment and other sectors of society are not due to individual impairments but rather a result of how society reacts and caters to those impairments. The WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is key in promoting this understanding of disability, which underlies the provisions of the UNCRPD.

Taking the right to work and employment as an example, countries are seeking to tackle the low employment rates and low rates of participation in the labour market, which is the situation of persons with disabilities of working-age everywhere, and to address the pattern that, when in employment, workers with disability are more likely to be in low-paid jobs with poor career prospects and working conditions than workers without disability. This situation has negative impacts at

many levels for the estimated 780 million persons with disabilities of working age. Many are counted among the working poor, and many more rely on social security benefits or charity, trapping them in a vicious cycle associated with widespread poverty for both themselves and their households. As a consequence, employers do not fully benefit from the unique and substantial contribution persons with disabilities can make in the workplace. From a national and global perspective, there are significant economic losses arising from high unemployment and lost productivity of women and men with disabilities – estimated at between 3 % and 7 % of Gross Domestic Product in a pilot study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of ten low and middle-income developing countries. Thus, effectively implementing the right to work and employment will have benefits across the board, and the ICF can be used to promote this right more effectively, through possible and innovative new approaches to vocational assessment, workplace disability evaluation and disability management.

This publication, *Handbook of Vocational Rehabilitation and Disability Evaluation – Application and Implementation of the ICF,* is timely in that it addresses pressing issues and themes of relevance to enabling persons with disabilities to work effectively and to reaching their full potential and participate in all sectors of society. Apart from the immediate audience of researchers, academicians and students in the field of work and employment, it is of broader relevance to policymakers and service providers, as they move to implement the provisions of the UNCRPD. By highlighting good and emerging practice in these areas and more broadly, through the use of the ICF as a conceptual model and classification system, it will make an important contribution to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities worldwide, and enabling societies to benefit from the valuable contribution that persons with disabilities can make in their communities.

Conditions of Work and Equality Department, Barbara Murray
International Labour Office, Geneva,
Switzerland

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Finally, our endless gratitude goes to all our stakeholders in the realm of vocational rehabilitation and disability evaluation for making us understand that they matter, and writing a book about them is the least we can do to advocate for their cause. Nothing can summarize it better than the words of Professor Stephen Hawking, *. . .it is very clear that the majority of people with disabilities in the world have an extremely difficult time with everyday survival, let alone productive employment and personal fulfillment. . . this century will mark a turning point for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the lives of their societies. . .*

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