



[https://doi.org/10.52058/2695-1592-2024-2\(33\)-26-36](https://doi.org/10.52058/2695-1592-2024-2(33)-26-36)

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ENABLING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: SOCIAL ENTERPRISE'S ROLE IN HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Abstract. The article explores the profound impact of social enterprise on enhancing economic autonomy for individuals with disabilities. It investigates the role of social enterprises as catalysts for empowerment, providing avenues for skill development, employment, and fostering inclusive economic growth. Through meticulous scrutiny of case studies, empirical research, and real-world instances, the article elucidates the interconnectedness of social enterprise, disability empowerment, and the broader economic milieu. It delves into how social enterprises address the distinct challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, encouraging their active engagement in the workforce and amplifying their contributions to the economy. By spotlighting success stories and strategies employed by social enterprises, the article underscores the potential of collaborative endeavors between social enterprise and disability empowerment to dismantle barriers, instigate social transformation, and unleash the latent talents of individuals with disabilities. The author emphasizes the paramount importance of inclusivity in society and illustrates how social enterprise initiatives play a pivotal role in dismantling barriers, championing diversity, and cultivating a more inclusive economy. By empowering individuals with disabilities, these initiatives contribute significantly to cultivating a more diverse and inclusive society, fostering a culture that embraces and values differences. In championing the cause of individuals with disabilities, society takes strides towards diminishing stigmas and biases, fostering a more equitable, empathetic, and understanding community. Individuals with disabilities bring diverse perspectives and problem-solving approaches to the workplace. This diversity can foster innovation and creativity, leading to the development of new products, services, and solutions. The author demonstrates that



many countries emphasize equal employment opportunities and anti-discrimination policies. Inclusion of people with disabilities is consistent with legal and ethical requirements, ensuring fair and just treatment of all citizens.

Keywords: Social enterprise, Inclusive Growth, Disability Inclusion, Inclusive Employment, Economic Independence, Disability Rights, Economic Sustainability

Statement of the problem in general view and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks. People with disabilities often face social exclusion and economic marginalization, limiting their access to employment and economic opportunities. This social challenge hampers their economic independence and overall societal integration. The underrepresentation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce creates an economic loss by disregarding a pool of diverse talents. The absence of their meaningful participation diminishes the economy's productivity potential. Social enterprise emerges as a prospective avenue to address this issue. By fostering inclusive business models and innovative strategies, it has the potential to create employment opportunities, cater to unmet needs, and amplify social inclusion for people with disabilities. Integrating people with disabilities into the workforce and promoting their enterprises not only supports them but also benefits the economy. It offers a chance to tap into an underutilized talent pool, sparks innovation, diversifies perspectives, and creates more inclusive markets. Addressing these challenges necessitates a multi-faceted approach involving policy frameworks, social initiatives, and collaborative efforts between governments, businesses, and civil society to create an enabling environment for social enterprise that supports people with disabilities.

Analysis of latest research and publications. The article by Sarah Parker Harris, Maija Renko, and Kate Caldwell [1] explores the concept of social enterprise as a potential avenue for employment for individuals with disabilities. The authors delve into the influence of political and economic contexts on the ability of social enterprises to foster employment for individuals with disabilities. They analyze policies, regulations, and economic structures that either facilitate or hinder the integration of disabled individuals into the workforce. The article by Eline Jammaers and Patrizia Zaroni [2] focuses on the identity work of entrepreneurs with disabilities. The authors analyze the narratives and self-perception of entrepreneurs with disabilities. This involves understanding how these individuals frame their personal stories, challenges, and achievements, shaping their entrepreneurial identity while dealing with societal perceptions related to disability. It considers the intersectionality of identities, recognizing that disability is just one facet of an individual's multifaceted identity. Cheryl Hiu-Kwan Chui, Michelle H. Y. Shum, and Terry Y. S. Lum [3] explore the concept of empowerment within Work Integration Social Enterprises. They examine how these enterprises serve as



platforms fostering empowerment among their employees, particularly individuals facing employment barriers. The article delves into the perspectives of employees working within WISE. It investigates how these individuals perceive the role of WISE in promoting empowerment, both personally and professionally, emphasizing their experiences and viewpoints. The article by Shaibu Bukari, Michael Ayikwei Quarshie, and Felix Kwame Opoku, titled "Exploring the perspectives of physically challenged women entrepreneurs in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, Ghana," [4] delve into the experiences of physically challenged women entrepreneurs in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. They likely examine the challenges, opportunities, and unique experiences encountered by these women in establishing and running their businesses. The authors explore how entrepreneurship empowers physically challenged women, enabling them to become financially independent and contribute to their communities. The article "Introduction: disability participation in the digital economy" by Haiqing Yu, Gerard Goggin, Karen Fisher, and Bingqin Li [5] introduce the intersection between disability and the digital economy. They may provide context on how people with disabilities engage with digital technologies and the challenges and opportunities they encounter in participating in the digital economy. The authors outline a research agenda aimed at further exploring and understanding the intersection of disability and the digital economy.

Even though there are a huge number of articles about the fact that people with disabilities should have the full right to work, acceptance by society, support, I believe that it is worth writing about it as often as possible, so that it causes a full-fledged transition to an inclusive and socially oriented economics.

Formulation of the goals of the article. The article aims to explore how social enterprise can serve as a conduit for empowering individuals with disabilities, enhancing their economic participation, and consequently contributing positively to the broader economy. It seeks to elucidate the scientific underpinnings and practical applications of leveraging social enterprise as a catalyst for societal inclusion and economic growth in the context of disability support.

Presentation of the main research material. It is worth starting the article by giving a definition of the concept of social enterprise, so that there is no confusion in the future, since the categorical apparatus in Ukraine is not very developed. A social enterprise is a business that is aimed at solving social problems: helping people, caring for the environment, caring for seriously ill people, providing work to the disabled, orphans, pensioners, and refugees. At the heart of social entrepreneurship is the manifestation of initiative in solving the problems of socially vulnerable categories of the population.

There are 2,8 million social economy enterprises, representing 10% of all businesses in the EU. Almost 13,6 million people – about 6,2% of the EU's employees – work for social economy enterprises. On top of the paid workforce, social economy mobilizes volunteers, equivalent to 5,5 million full-time workers [6].

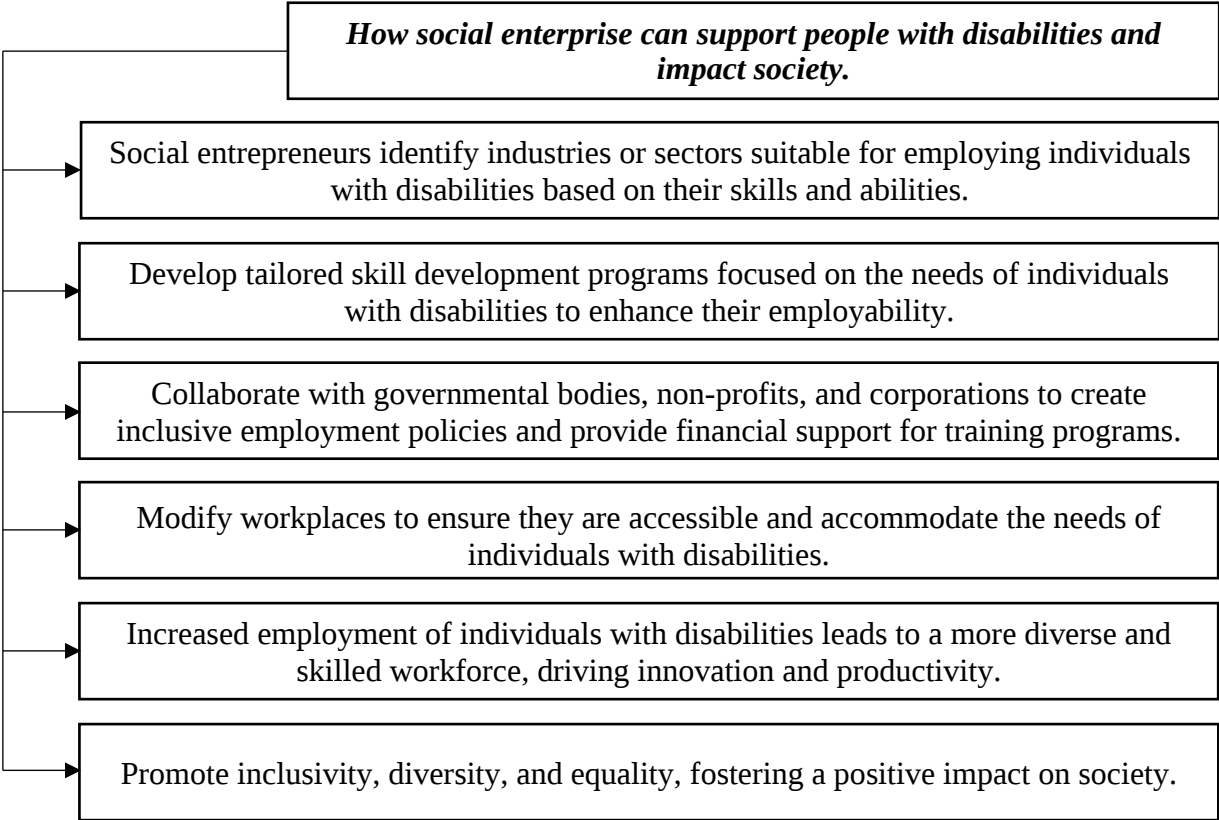


Fig.1. Possibilities of social enterprises for people with disabilities
Resource: created by the author

By following such a scheme (fig.1), social enterprise can facilitate a more inclusive workforce, contributing to economic growth while fostering a more equitable and diverse society.

Social enterprises focusing on employing individuals with disabilities have emerged, emphasizing inclusivity, and creating work environments that accommodate diverse needs. These ventures develop innovative solutions, from flexible work arrangements to specialized training programs, breaking down traditional employment barriers.

Moreover, social enterprise not only offers employment but also fosters a supportive community. It helps in building self-esteem, confidence, and skill development, providing a platform for individuals with disabilities to contribute meaningfully to society. Support for these initiatives can come from various sources, including governments, NGOs, and corporations, by investing in programs that encourage inclusive employment practices and providing resources for skill development and accessibility.

People with disabilities should be supported by the best possible methods, for this there are various funds around the world that help to open their own company and work, provide funds for training. In Europe, several foundations and



organizations are dedicated to supporting people with disabilities through various programs. Some notable foundations and their programs include:

1. European Disability Forum (EDF): is an umbrella organization representing people with disabilities in Europe. They advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities and collaborate with European institutions to ensure inclusivity and equality.

2. Leonard Cheshire: operates in several European countries, offering various programs that support disabled individuals in finding employment, providing community-based support, and promoting inclusive education.

3. European Foundation Centre (EFC): connects foundations and donors across Europe, some of which have specific programs supporting people with disabilities. They fund projects related to disability rights, accessibility, and empowerment.

4. The European Disability Foundation (EDF): funds various programs aimed at promoting accessibility, rights, and opportunities for individuals with disabilities. They support initiatives related to education, employment, and independent living.

5. Fundación ONCE (Spain): foundation that supports people with disabilities, offering programs focusing on vocational training, employment, accessibility, and social inclusion.

6. The Big Lottery Fund (UK): not exclusively focused on disability, the Big Lottery Fund in the UK supports projects aimed at improving the lives of disabled individuals, providing funding for community-based programs, employment initiatives, and social inclusion projects.

7. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the European Union (EU)'s main instrument for investing in people and supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. With a budget of almost EUR 99.3 billion for the period 2021-2027, the ESF+ will continue to provide an important contribution to the EU's employment, social, education and skills policies, including structural reforms in these areas.

The Fund will also be one of the cornerstones of EU socio-economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic has reversed gains in labour participation, challenged educational and health systems and increased inequalities. The ESF+ will be one of the key EU instruments helping Member States to address these challenges.

As part of cohesion policy, the ESF+ will also continue its mission to support economic, territorial, and social cohesion in the EU – reducing disparities between Member States and regions.

The ESF+ brings together four funding instruments that were separate in the programming period 2014-20: the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) the Youth Employment Initiative and the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) [7].



8. The ESF Social Innovation+ initiative facilitates the transfer and upscaling of innovative solutions to the societal challenges of today, notably in the fields of employment, education, skills, and social inclusion. ESF Social Innovation+ has a budget of €197 million for the 2021-2027 programming period.

9. The Lithuanian European Social Fund Agency (ESFA) has been entrusted to establish the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation and to implement the initiative during the 2021-2027 period [8].

These foundations and organizations often run programs that focus on education, skills development, employment opportunities, accessibility improvements, advocacy, and awareness campaigns to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities across Europe.

Addressing unemployment among individuals with disabilities is crucial worldwide. People with disabilities often face barriers to employment due to prejudices, inaccessible workplaces, and a lack of appropriate accommodations. Social enterprise can play a significant role in empowering and providing opportunities for this group.

The correlation between a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its expenditure on disabilities can vary due to several factors, including government policies, social welfare systems, healthcare spending, and societal priorities.

Countries with higher GDPs might allocate more resources to support individuals with disabilities, but this isn't always the case. Some countries with lower GDPs may prioritize social programs and allocate a significant portion of their budget to disabilities support. Conversely, certain wealthy countries might spend less in relative terms on disability services due to various factors like efficient healthcare systems, innovative technologies, or different social structures.

GDP itself doesn't directly determine the allocation of funds to support people with disabilities; it's more about a country's social policies, healthcare systems, and government initiatives. Each country's approach to supporting individuals with disabilities is influenced by a complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors (Table 1).

Developing the social sector in countries with low GDP is crucial for several reasons:

- Human Capital Development: Investment in education, healthcare, and social services enhances human capital. Educated and healthy citizens are more productive, innovative, and contribute positively to economic growth and development.

Table 1.

Examples of countries with a low level of GDP, but with a vector of social development and their support programs

Country	Bhutan	Rwanda	Bangladesh	Nepal	Malawi
Programs	<i>Free Education:</i> free education for its citizens up to the secondary level, aiming to ensure widespread access to education. <i>Healthcare Services:</i> efforts to enhance healthcare services, providing free basic healthcare to its citizens through a network of health centers and hospitals. <i>Environmental Conservation:</i> to preserve its natural environment by prioritizing sustainable development, renewable energy, and maintaining its forest cover. <i>Cultural Preservation:</i> preserving its unique cultural heritage, promoting traditional arts, crafts, and festivals.	<i>Girinka Program:</i> aims to reduce poverty and malnutrition by providing cows to vulnerable families. <i>Ubudehe Program:</i> social protection by identifying vulnerable households and providing support such as financial assistance, training, and access to resources. <i>One Laptop per Child (OLPC)</i> <i>Rwanda:</i> focuses on improving education by providing laptops to primary school students. <i>Imbuto Foundation:</i> focuses on various social programs, including education, health, and youth empowerment. <i>Housing Programs:</i> various housing initiatives to address housing challenges, particularly for low-income families.	<i>Microfinance Initiatives:</i> provides small loans to impoverished individuals, especially women, to start small businesses and escape poverty. <i>BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee):</i> operates numerous programs focusing on education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and women's empowerment. <i>Primary Education Stipend Program:</i> to reduce gender disparities in education and promote literacy. <i>Healthcare Initiatives:</i> implemented various healthcare initiatives to improve access to healthcare services, especially in rural areas. <i>Disaster Preparedness Programs:</i> disaster preparedness programs.	<i>Community-Based Rehabilitation Program:</i> aim to integrate people with disabilities into mainstream society by providing healthcare, education, and skills training. <i>School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP):</i> focuses on improving the quality of education by enhancing access, equity, and governance in schools. <i>Microfinance and Livelihood Programs:</i> aimed at empowering women and marginalized communities by providing them with financial services and livelihood opportunities. <i>Healthcare Initiatives:</i> healthcare programs to improve access to basic healthcare services in rural and remote areas. <i>Land Reform and Rural Development Programs:</i> to improve agricultural practices access to resources.	<i>Girls' Education:</i> aim to increase girls' enrollment and retention rates by providing scholarships, building more schools, and training female teachers. <i>Healthcare and HIV/AIDS Programs:</i> focused on maternal and child health, combating HIV/AIDS, and improving access to healthcare services, particularly in rural areas. <i>Agricultural Development Programs:</i> to improve food security, increase agricultural productivity, and support small-scale farmers. <i>Community-Based Development Projects:</i> focused on improving infrastructure, sanitation, and access to clean water in rural areas. <i>Youth Empowerment and Skills Training:</i> training and skills development for youth to reduce unemployment rates. They equip young people.

Resource: created by the author

- Reducing Inequality: Developing the social sector can reduce socioeconomic disparities by providing equal access to essential services, opportunities, and resources. This reduces poverty and promotes social inclusion.
- Improved Public Health: Adequate healthcare services improve the overall health of the population, leading to a more productive workforce. Prevention and treatment of diseases contribute to economic stability by reducing healthcare costs and preventing productivity losses due to illness.
- Enhancing Labor Market Efficiency: Investing in education and skills development creates a skilled workforce, which is vital for economic growth. Social

programs that reduce barriers to employment and provide training can decrease unemployment rates and enhance labor productivity.

– Sustainable Development: Addressing social issues such as poverty, education, and healthcare fosters sustainable development. It creates a foundation for long-term economic growth by ensuring social stability, reducing crime rates, and creating an environment conducive to business growth.

– Social Cohesion and Stability: A well-developed social sector fosters social cohesion and stability by promoting inclusivity, reducing social tensions, and addressing societal issues. This stability is vital for attracting investments and promoting economic growth.

Investing in the social sector in countries with low GDP is essential for creating a more equitable society, improving public health, building human capital, fostering sustainable development, and ensuring social stability, all of which contribute to long-term economic growth and prosperity.

1.3 billion people – or 16% of the global population – experience a significant disability today. This number is growing because of an increase in noncommunicable diseases and people living longer. Persons with disabilities die earlier, have poorer health, and experience more limitations in everyday functioning than others [9].

There could be almost an US\$ 10 return for every US\$ 1 spent on implementing disability inclusive prevention and care for noncommunicable diseases.

The economic impact of not involving people with disabilities in the workforce can be substantial. Estimates suggest that the exclusion of individuals with disabilities from employment leads to significant economic losses for both individuals and society (table 2).

Table 2.

Population and income data for PWD and their Friends and Family

	Global	US	Canada	Europe	Asia
PWD Population	1.85B	80.3mm	9.1mm	123.9mm	1.15B
PWD Income	>\$3.00T	\$1.68T	\$171.2B	\$1.17T	NA
PWD Disposable	>\$1.90T	\$1.28T	\$82.2	\$547.1B	NA
Friends & Family Population	3.43B	149mm	17mm	229mm	2.13B
Friends & Family Disposable	>\$10.71T	\$7.10T	\$538.5B	\$3.07T	NA

Resource: [11]



In Japan, as of June 1, 2022, the number of people with disabilities working in companies reached about 614,000 – a record high for the 19th consecutive year. However, only 48.3% of all firms have achieved the legally mandated employment rate. Many small and medium-sized companies do not have the know-how on employing people with disabilities, and it is likely that more support will be required for such firms [10]. National and local governments, whose current employment rate of people with disabilities is higher than that of the private sector, will raise the figure to 3%, while prefectural education boards will boost the ratio to 2.9%. The same 0.4 percentage point increase as that of the private sector will similarly be applied in two stages.

Efforts to increase the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce, such as through social enterprise initiatives, not only benefit these individuals by providing them with employment opportunities but also positively impact the economy by leveraging their skills and contributions. These initiatives create a more inclusive environment, fostering innovation, diversity, and economic growth.

To date, various studies have been conducted to estimate the cost of disability in different countries. For example, in Australia, the total economic cost of intellectual disabilities (ID) is estimated to be approximately US\$14,720 billion per year. Karami Matin and others. in 2004 estimated the direct cost of a stroke per person in Sweden to be approximately \$56,024. In Germany, the total costs for the 4th year after a stroke amounted to almost 3 billion euros [12].

Among 29 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the late 2000s, seven had lower employment rates for citizens with disabilities than the U.S., according to a 2010 OECD report with the most recent figures. Hungary, Ireland, and Poland have particularly low employment rates for their citizens with disabilities, while the Nordic countries, Mexico and Switzerland have the highest rates.

People with disabilities can make significant contributions to the economy in various ways:

- **Diverse Skill Set:** Individuals with disabilities often possess unique skills, perspectives, and problem-solving abilities that can benefit workplaces. Their diverse experiences can enhance creativity and innovation within teams.
- **Workforce Inclusion:** By employing people with disabilities, businesses create an inclusive workforce that reflects societal diversity. This inclusivity fosters an environment of equality and enhances the company's reputation, attracting diverse talent and consumers.
- **Consumer Base:** People with disabilities constitute a significant market segment. Employing individuals who understand the needs and challenges of this demographic can help businesses tailor products and services, effectively reaching this consumer base and boosting revenue.



– Higher Retention and Productivity: Studies show that employees with disabilities often have equal or higher job retention rates and productivity levels compared to their non-disabled counterparts. With appropriate accommodations, they can thrive and contribute positively to the workplace.

– Innovation and Problem Solving: Many people with disabilities have experience adapting to challenges, which can lead to innovative solutions and approaches to problem-solving. This ability to navigate obstacles creatively can benefit employers in various industries.

– Government Incentives: Several governments offer incentives to companies that hire individuals with disabilities, such as tax credits, subsidies for accommodations, and funding for workplace modifications. This support encourages businesses to employ a diverse workforce.

– Skills Development and Training: Providing training and development opportunities tailored to people with disabilities can help them acquire new skills and further contribute to the economy, creating a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

By recognizing and leveraging the unique skills and perspectives of individuals with disabilities, societies can foster an inclusive economy that benefits from the diverse talents and contributions of all its members.

Summary. This article delves into the critical role that social enterprise plays in empowering individuals with disabilities by fostering inclusive economic opportunities. It explores how initiatives within the realm of social enterprise aim to harness the untapped potential of people with disabilities, creating pathways towards economic empowerment. By examining various programs, initiatives, and strategies, the article emphasizes the importance of inclusive practices and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It highlights how social enterprise initiatives contribute not only to the economic independence of individuals but also to the overall societal benefit by advocating for diversity, equality, and the realization of the untapped potential of disabled individuals.

Acknowledgement. This article is integral to the Affiliated Honorary Research Fellow four-year program to earn the Patron of Philosophy title, conducted by Prof. Fil. Dr. Jan-Urban Sandal.

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