

Project Application Form

Under the Recovery and Resilience Facility

1. Project name
"Personal mobility and accessibility for people with permanent disabilities"
2. Description of the project (objectives, main activities)
<p>The overall goal of the project is aimed at promoting activities to ensure personal mobility and accessibility for people with permanent disabilities for their social inclusion, taking into account their specific needs.</p> <p>The overall goal will be achieved through the implementation of the main project activities, which include:</p> <p>№ 1. Provision and financing of high quality and high-tech technical aids for people with permanent disabilities, incl. computer configuration and / or laptop with licensed software; specialized software programs; electronic technical means for compensation of sensory deficit, technical and medical devices, and other similar auxiliary techniques and technologies, according to the specific needs.</p> <p>№ 2. Provision and financing of aids for people with permanent disabilities to create an accessible environment (for example: device and equipment for adapting a motor vehicle, electro stimulators, etc.) related to their mobility and free movement.</p> <p>№ 3. Providing training of users for the use of the technical aids and assistive technologies.</p> <p>№ 4. Financing the conducting of an information and explanatory campaign for popularization of the project activities.</p> <p>This project proposal is in line with the Council's Specific Recommendations addressed to Bulgaria during the European Semester in the period 2017-2020. The planned activities are based on the conclusion of the EC on: "It is still difficult for people with disabilities to lead independent lives. In 2018, the share of people without disabilities at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 49.5%, 19.5 percentage points higher than the people without disabilities, and 20.7 percentage points above the EU average. Meeting the different needs of support and providing alternatives and an accessible environment will allow the people with disabilities to participate in the community." These data are the result of various studies and surveys carried out by independent observers and included in the EC Report for Bulgaria for 2020.</p> <p>Apart from that, according to a number of reports, analyses, expressed positions, including by non-governmental organizations, Bulgaria ranks one of the first places in the EU in terms of lack of accessibility of the environment. Signals of an inaccessible environment show that this problem has existed in our society for a long time and continues also today.</p> <p>People with disabilities enjoy the special care of the state and the society, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria.</p> <p>The full and equal exercise of the rights of people with disabilities is a national priority, requiring the implementation of an active, purposeful and consistent policy, as well as the unification of the actions of the responsible institutions and organizations with the active participation of civil society. The policy is developed in accordance with the goals and</p>

measures set in the Government Management Program of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2021, in accordance with the national commitments to implement the requirements of the ratified UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as in compliance with the priorities of the relevant strategic documents.

In 2018, our country launched consistent actions to reform the social sphere, in particular in the field of policy on the rights of people with disabilities. This policy is based on a specific strategic framework and broad legislation that engages a number of stakeholders, including public and private sector, civil society, etc.

The vision of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy for the development of the policy on the rights of people with disabilities in recent years is closely linked to the implementation of an integrated approach with a horizontal impact, combining the resources in different sectoral policies. One of the main emphasis is the creation of conditions and opportunities for providing targeted support and encouragement measures for the vulnerable groups of people with disabilities, which especially in the current conditions of dynamic macroeconomic conditions and regional disparities has a positive impact on improving the quality of life and prevention of social exclusion.

There are still many barriers that prevent people with disabilities from exercising in full their rights, and these barriers limit their participation in society. People with disabilities continue to face challenges in accessing mobility and accessibility-related aids, appliances and medical devices that they need, and the barriers to the surrounding environment.

The project addresses these challenges by including activities aimed at promoting and increasing the opportunity for provision of high quality technical aids and technologies to support mobility, accessibility and communications for people with disabilities in the country.

It is important to point out that with the new legislation in the field of the policy on the rights of people with disabilities, which dates from the end of 2018, the aim is to improve the scope and adequacy of the provided public support, depending on the degree and the type of disability and the individual needs of people with disabilities with a view to social inclusion. Active participation in various spheres of public life of people with disabilities, especially in the labor market, is among the main long-term priorities of the government, as well as in fulfilling the requirements under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Currently, one of the biggest policy challenges in this area is to ensure employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and in the context of labor shortages in the labor market, increased migration, regional disparities and demographic crisis, the reserve of potential labor force in the face of people with disabilities is justified and appropriate to be supported. However, the number of those who find it increasingly difficult to achieve resilience in the world of labor due to disabilities is growing. At the same time, work and social integration are inextricably linked. Employment presupposes the fastest socialization and prevention of social exclusion. In this way better conditions and motivation are created for people with disabilities to be included in the labor market, in order to receive income from work, the availability of social security contribution and the relevant social security rights, building social contacts and etc. The growth in employment of this target group would reflect positively on the economy and the sustainable economic development, taking into account that income generation is linked to increasing consumption, affects the tax and social security system, generates revenues for the state budget and of course, with effect for the business. This also allows for some segregation in terms of the social policy as a whole and a reduction in the establishment of permanent dependence on relevant benefits. Empowering and ensuring sustainable employment for people with disabilities of working age is necessary and key condition. In addition, the employment of people with disabilities in Bulgaria is a national priority that requires constant political and public attention, as well as a maximum degree of coordination of policies related to it.

The realization on the labor market of people with disabilities is mainly regulated in the

Employment Promotion Act and the People with Disabilities Act (PDA).

In accordance with the norms envisaged in the PDA, an organization has been introduced in the labor offices in the country, allowing the provision of specialized labor mediation for the unemployed with disabilities. People with disabilities are equal in the use of employment services provided by the labor offices. The labor intermediaries apply an individual approach to this group, and the opportunities for their labor integration are determined on the basis of the professional, personal and health characteristics and needs, and of course the state of the labor market.

In the PDA is envisaged that the employment of people with disabilities shall take place in a standard (integrated/normal), specialised or sheltered work environment.

Employment under normal conditions on the open labor market presupposes the fastest socialization for people with disabilities and prevention of social exclusion. In order to guarantee and increase the employment of this target group, a quota was introduced for employers to hire workers and employees with permanent disabilities (employers with 50 and more than 50 employees are affected). The quota principle is borrowed from the international practice to support the exercise of the right to work by persons with disabilities. The aim is to create opportunities for sustainable employment. The regulated linking of public spending in the form of subsidies for hiring people with permanent disabilities with the fulfilled commitments under the quota is also observed, in order to improve the corporate social responsibility. Through the specialized control activity on behalf of the the labor inspection bodies and the offered intermediary services for the employers by the Employment Agency, an opportunity for control and application of the quota has been created.

A number of mechanisms have been set up to encourage employers, use of incentives and preferences in order to employ people with disabilities.

There is also an opportunity for an employer who has created a production unit or sector in which 5 or more people with disabilities work to be able to use preferences for these production structures and for the people with disabilities working in them, such as: providing funding for targeted projects and programs of specialized enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities, as well as for reimbursement of paid social security contributions.

A new important point is the introduction for the first time in the Bulgarian legal practice of the sheltered employment institute, regulated as a new form of employment, implemented in Sheltered Employment Centres, as a mechanism to support the labor integration of people with multiple permanent disabilities in order to ensure performing productive activity, paid work and providing personal support services. With the latest normative changes from 2020, the range of persons subject to sheltered employment has been expanded, namely with persons with intellectual disabilities and mental disorders.

Given the emergencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, among the vulnerable social groups that need special attention through support measures are namely the groups of people with permanent disabilities.

Most measures, including those related to labor integration and social protection, focus mainly on social payments, training, adaptability of the work environment and subsidies for the employers. There is a lack of innovative measures related to the adaptation of the accessibility of the environment, which would help strengthen the reformist approach undertaken for the transformation from a medical to a social model for the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The main obstacle for people with disabilities to participate in the labor market or in the education system is undoubtedly the lack of accessibility and mobility. The accessible environment as a whole would create preconditions for the implementation of flexible forms of employment for people with disabilities, which is also in response to overcoming the challenges posed by the spread of coronavirus and the need to readjust the existing models for public support. This would encourage the desire of people with disabilities to lead a normal life in the community.

The provided auxiliary techniques and technologies, together with the conducted training for their use, will be a guarantor, indicating the sustainability of the undertaken initiative, as well as for upgrading and complementarity with the started project actions in the field of working capacity expertise and improvement of the model for individual needs assessment of the people with disabilities for the purpose of real social inclusion in the life of the community. This would potentially lead to relevant regulatory legal changes in the field of the state policy on the rights of people with disabilities.

State aid: The costs of this project do not constitute state aid within the meaning of Art. 107 and 108 of the TFEU as far as the technical aids will be provided to individuals on the basis of their personal needs.

3. Beneficiary

Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.

4. Time schedule for project Implementation, including activities, stages¹

Project implementation period: 30 months (2021-2023)



Timeline RRP.xlsx

4.1. When can the project implementation start at the earliest after its approval?

The project can start immediately after its approval for funding.
Indicative date for starting the project: 01.07.2020

5. Indicative financial resource by activity, including sources of financing (national budget, European funding, private funding, IFIs)

Total for the whole project: BGN 24 million, provided with European funding.

5.1. Indicative allocation of the financial resource, depending on the type of expense

- Construction / rehabilitation of infrastructure (CIW) - 0%
- Physical capital (purchase of machinery and equipment)- 55%
- Human capital (skills development, retraining...)- 0%
- Labor (wage costs, consultancy services...)- 5%
- Technology (costs for acquisition of intangible fixed assets - patents, software...) - 40%
- For physical capital (purchase of machinery and equipment) – BGN 13 200 000

¹ The time schedule shall be relevant for determining interim targets within the framework of the Recovery and Resilience Plan and is directly related to the disbursement of grant instalments from the Recovery and Resilience Fund.

- For labor (wage costs, consultancy services) – BGN 1 200 000
- For Technology (costs for acquisition of intangible fixed assets - patents, software...) – BGN 9 600 000

Expenditures from the total resource on the main activities:

- direct costs for providing technical aids for people with permanent disabilities, incl. the provision of training for their use, respectively by main activities № 1 - № 3 - 22 800 000 BGN, incl. BGN 345,000 for conducting trainings for the persons by the traders, who provided the respective technical aid;
- costs for organization, management, monitoring, publicity and visualization, as well as use of consultancy services for project implementation – 1 200 000 BGN.

It is envisaged that the main activities will be implemented in the following stages:

1. Formation of a team for organization, management and monitoring, including for publicity and visualization of the project:
 - 1.1. Designation of MLSP experts / specialists and the leading project partners with professional expertise in the field.
 - 1.2. Announcement, selection and appointment of external consultants to participate in the organization, management and monitoring team.
 - 1.3. Publicity and visualization of the project.
 - 1.4. Reporting, control and monitoring of project activities.
2. Development of a methodology for selection of the persons, subject to support:
 - 2.1. Identification of the needs on the basis of a preliminary study of the needs of high-tech and high-quality technical aids for people with permanent disabilities for active social inclusion in the various spheres of the public life.
 - 2.2. Establishing the circle of persons subject to support.
 - 2.3. Determining the modalities for access and providing the support.
 - 2.4. Consultations with the stakeholders.
3. Conducting an information and awareness campaign for popularization of the project activities:
 - 3.1. Preparation of informational materials for project advertising.
 - 3.2. Organization and conducting of information campaigns.
 - 3.3. Organization and holding of public events, etc.
4. Applying of individuals via the social assistance system. Selection of the candidates according to the Methodology and approval of beneficiaries.
5. Carrying out a procedure under the Public Procurement Act:
 - 5.1. Preparation of technical specifications, according to the Public Procurement Act and the accompanying documentation in connection with the provision and financing of technical aids for people with disabilities.
 - 5.2. Conducting procedures for selection of contractors for providing technical aids to those in need.
 - 5.3. Selection of contractors and conclusion of financing agreements.
6. Actual provision of technical aids to people with permanent disabilities with identified needs.
7. Providing training for the use of the technical aids by the beneficiaries and warranty support during the exploitation.

6. Indicators

6.1. Result indicator/s

Number of people with permanent disabilities with provided technical aids and / or specialized software programs.

- Initial value – 500 [year 2021]
- Intermediate value – 2 000 [year 2022]
- Final value – 3300 [year 2023]

The number of persons is expected to reach 3,300 at the end of the project implementation of the set activities.

It is a pilot project and envisages approbation of the activities according to indicative target values for people in need of high quality and specific technologies to support their functional limitations in view of active social inclusion (also mentioned in the demarcation).

The values are derived on the basis of data from the official administrative statistics on the number of persons with permanent disabilities as per individual indicators by competent authorities. It should be noted that the planned/projected values are indicated based on data for 2020.

According to information submitted by the National Expert Medical Commission (NEMC), 57,936 is the number of people with permanent disabilities with over 90% degree of disability aged from 16 to 65, for whom the Territorial Expert Medical Commission's (TEMC) decision states that they do not work, including those looking for work, permanently unemployed, discouraged and persons who due to their illness cannot work.

According to information submitted by the Employment Agency, the registered as unemployed persons with disabilities are nearly 13,000. 8,318 is the number of the people with permanent disabilities with over 90% degree of disability aged from 16 to 65 who are registered as unemployed actively looking for work, 2,491 of which are the persons in need of specific exterior assistance. It is estimated that 25% of the total number of registered unemployed persons with disabilities need support for provision of funds for mobility and accessibility for the purposes of the long-term socialization.

In addition, according to National Statistical institute data at the end of 2019 on the indicator "population aged 15 - 64 years by employment status" the number of unemployed persons with disabilities is 4,000 (Labor Force Survey).

By conducting a preliminary study of the market share, production capacity, logistics and distribution structure in the field of high-tech aids and assistive technologies in Bulgaria and the opportunities for development of the market niche in this industry, including to identify the needs of potential applicants for support from this type of funds, respectively before the start of the project activities, will create an opportunity for a more detailed argumentation of the set indicators.

The eligible target groups will be people with permanent disabilities who have not received financial support to meet the necessary need by institutions operating with funds from the state budget, etc. and are selected in accordance with the set conditions and requirements in the Methodology developed for the purposes of the project.

"Aids, devices and equipment" are allowances intended by the manufacturer to compensate lost or damaged function of a human organ in order to increase the possibilities for self-care, labor and other activity of people with disabilities.

The indicators will be measured through periodic project implementation reports and the relevant contracts.

Number of people with permanent disabilities trained to use the technical aids and / or specialized software programs provided to them.

- Initial value – 500 [year 2021]
- Intermediate value – 2 000 [year 2022]
- Final value – 3300 [year 2023]

The expected result is for about 3,300 people with improved social status and included in a particular area of the public life (labor market, educational system, opportunity to conduct rehabilitation to improve health condition, etc.).

The stakeholders' analyses and shared opinions so far show that one of the main obstacles to the active participation of people with disabilities in the community life is the lack of access to high-quality and innovative aids needed to ensure and facilitate their mobility and accessibility as a whole, and when they have such assistive technologies, it is assumed to overcome the barriers in their surrounding environment.

The indicators will be measured through the periodic project implementation reports and the relevant contracts.

Contracted funds indicator:

2021 - BGN 24 million

6.2. Effect indicator/s

No effect indicator/s are foreseen.

7. Does the project require the opening of a procedure pursuant to the Public Procurement Act (PPA)?

Yes, it is required.

All project activities related to the provision of technical aids or auxiliary technologies will be assigned under the Public Procurement Act.

7.1. If a procedure under the Public Procurement Act is required, what part of the activities and financial resources will be subject of the public procurement?

All project activities, except for the hiring of project administration staff (provided that the project allows indirect costs related to the organization and management of the project) and the conducting of an information and explanatory campaign for popularization of the project activities, will be a subject of public procurement under the PPA.

7.2. If a procedure under the Public Procurement Act is required, what is the indicative schedule for its implementation?

All award procedures under the Public Procurement Act will have an implementation period of not less than 6 and not longer than 12 months from the start date of project implementation.

For more information, see the project time schedule.

8. Demarcation and complementarity

8.1. If similar projects have been implemented (regardless of their source of funding), describe how this project builds on/complements what has

been achieved with previous projects.

The project as a whole has no analogue, proposed or approved for funding by the above mentioned financial donors external for MLSP or through national funds - in order to avoid overlapping similar activities or double funding, the proposal is consistent with current or implemented projects.

The project builds on and complements projects / support provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Social Protection Fund under the forms of targeted support for active and independent living and support for the personal mobility of people with permanent disabilities (for example, the National Program for Accessible Environment and Personal Mobility, according to Article 56 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, via provision of financial support for adaptation of a personal motor vehicle, ect.) through budget funding, expanding the scope of the planned activities and potential beneficiaries and creating an opportunity for a wider financial framework, which implies flexibility and variability in its implementation.

8.2. If similar projects are envisaged to be implemented under the Partnership Agreement programs, the centrally managed facilities of EU or the Just Transition Fund, outline the demarcation with this project.

Within this project, activities will be funded to provide personal mobility and accessibility for people with permanent disabilities by providing and funding high-quality technical aids, specialized software programs, promoting innovations and similar activities that will not be supported under the Partnership Agreement programs, the centrally managed facilities of the EU or the Just Transition Fund.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is a beneficiary of project BG05M9OP001-3.010 "Working capacity expertise", funded by the Operational Program Human Resources Development 2014-2020, with partners - the Ministry of Health and the National Social Security Institute. The main activities of the project are related to the Concept for reforming the system of working capacity expertise - a document through which the ministry defines its vision for changing the model of working capacity expertise, as a part of the measures to improve the care for people with disabilities in the country. The concept is based on the criteria and principles of the International Classification of Human Functionality, Disability and Health (ICF), prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO), for the introduction into the international plan of uniform, standardized concepts for describing the functioning, disability and human health and instruments for bound of the medical assessment (type and degree of disability) and the social environment in which functional disabilities appear as work limitations. The reform of the working capacity expertise envisages the construction of a new system, as the current model is divided into two - medical expertise and expertise of the working capacity. Both expertises should be performed according to ICF-compliant methodologies. In this regard, the main activities of the project are related to the Concept and envisage the provision of expert support for the integration of ICF' standards in the activity of the medical expert commissions and the commissions for working capacity expertise; providing expert support for the development of the methodologies for the work of the commissions and training of the employees in the commissions for work with the new methodologies. In implementation of Activity 1 of the project, a study has been conducted on the experience of EU Member States (France and Italy) that apply ICF standards and have ratified ILO Convention № 37 on Disability Insurance (industry and etc.), 1933. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has an agreement with the WHO and has an official ICF translation. The project is ongoing (in progress).

Since the first half of 2020 is in progress a project with subject: "Reform undertaken in the field of state policy on the rights of people with disabilities in the Republic of Bulgaria" and a specific beneficiary Policy for People with Disabilities, Equal Opportunities and Social Allowances Directorate, MLSP, funded by the European Union Structural Reform Support Programme 2017-2020 (*Regulation (EU) 2017/825 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment on the Structural Reform Support Programme for the period 2017 to 2020 and amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 1305/2013, as amended by Regulation (EU) 2018/1671 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 amending Regulation (EU) 2017/825 to increase the financial envelope of the Structural Reform Support Programme and adapt its general objective*). The project is aimed at exchanging experience and obtaining information from expertise, research and analyses related to certain aspects of the new legislation in the field of the rights of people with disabilities, in particular Methodologies / Guidelines for individual need assessment of support for people with disabilities and etc. in order to introduce modern methods and approaches of evaluation procedures, as well as to reduce the administrative burden.

Currently, the activities for the implementation of the so-called "technical support" continue with the cooperation of a World Bank team (a contractor for the project) with a horizon of 18 months. The World Bank team is assisted by local consultants with professional expertise in the field. The World Bank team is set to, after an in-depth analysis, to propose a new toolkit based on particular areas of the WHO ICF Classification, which will be initially tested among 3,000 people by trained of the project team social workers in the country. The results of the evaluation will be leading in assessing whether such tools have a basis for development in the social system in Bulgaria and how exactly the processes and mechanisms in the field could be improved for the greatest help and interest for the people with disabilities. Opportunities will be sought for potential synergies between the working capacity expertise and the individual need assessment for better results achievement.

The planned activities under this project complement the launched initiatives described above for the purposes of the overall reform in the social sphere, related to the active and consistent efforts in the social inclusion of people with disabilities in various spheres of public life, especially in the labor market for achieving long-term socialization.

9. Does the project directly contribute to the implementation of any of the Council's Specific Recommendations addressed to Bulgaria in the framework of the European Semester in the period 2017-2020? Please describe how.

The project activities will contribute to the implementation of a Council's Specific Recommendation addressed to Bulgaria in the framework of the European Semester in the period 2017-2020. According to the findings in the Report for Bulgaria 2020 under the European Semester 2020: assessment of the progress in structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances and the results of in-depth reviews in accordance with Regulation (EU) № 1176/2011 people with disabilities still find it difficult to lead independent lives. In 2018, the share of people with disabilities at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 49.5%, 19.5 percentage points higher than those without disabilities, and 20.7 percentage points above the EU average. It is stated that the employment rate of people with disabilities remains one of the lowest in the EU (39.5% compared to the EU average of 50.7%), with a very large gap compared to people without disabilities (34,2 percentage points compared to the EU average of 24.2 percentage points). Meeting the different needs of support and providing alternatives and

an accessible environment will allow people with disabilities to participate in the community.

One of the Council's Specific Recommendations regarding to the National Reform Program of Bulgaria for 2020 and containing an opinion of the Council on the Convergence Program of Bulgaria for 2020, is Bulgaria to undertake actions in 2020 and 2021 to ensure adequate social protection and basic services for all and strengthen the active labor market policies. To improve the access to remote working and promote digital skills and the equal access to education. To address the shortcomings regarding the adequacy of the minimum income scheme (CSR 2). In order to reach this recommendation, the circumstances have been taken into account that the COVID-19 crisis disproportionately affects vulnerable groups and exacerbates existing social challenges. The proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion was high even before the crisis, especially among people with disabilities, and social transfers managed to reduce poverty only to a limited extent. Income inequality in Bulgaria was among the highest in the EU, and the effect of tax and social security systems on its reduction was among the weakest in the Union. In order to overcome the crisis, it is necessary to take measures to eliminate the shortcomings identified in previous years. Enhanced cooperation between health and social services will make it possible to reach people who are unable to take care of themselves and people with disabilities more effectively.

People with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups in the labor market. The reasons are complex. Among the reasons for the poor labor integration of the people with disabilities is the social isolation and lack of motivation, as well as the reluctance of the employers to incur additional costs to provide a suitable work environment for these people, which is consistent with their functional capabilities. Another reason is the dominant attitudes and stereotypes of society, including business, of misconceptions caused by doubts and scepticism about their capacity. One of the most serious problems for people with disabilities is the provision of an accessible environment, which still does not find a good solution, despite the established legal framework. People with permanently reduced working capacity do not receive adequate professional training/qualification to acquire the skills and competencies necessary for sustainable job placement. The confidence in the efficiency of the labor offices is low, which is why a small part of those who identify themselves as unemployed with disabilities have registered there. Unfortunately, this process is deepening in the current economic crisis.

In view of the above, accessibility and mobility for people with disabilities is a key element for full social inclusion in the life of the community and in response to the need for creation an adequate conditions to meet the needs for independent living in this aspect.

10. Does the project contribute to the implementation of a reform in a given sector? Please describe how.

The project will have a direct effect on the implementation of the reform in the field of the rights of people with disabilities, outlined in the new legislation aimed at supporting the social inclusion of people with disabilities in all spheres of public life in the country. Regulatory areas and means of providing support for people with disabilities also include ensuring personal mobility with the maximum extend of independence, accessibility and reasonable facilities.

The implementation of the project will help to establish one of the main principles of the current Persons with Disabilities Act (PDA) - equality and accessibility.

In accordance with the current regulations under PDA, target benefit is provided to people with disabilities for the provision of aids, equipment and medical devices (AEMD), which is linked to conduction of individual needs assessment by the Social Assistance Agency. People with disabilities through identifying the needs, receive target benefit for the development/production, purchase and/or repair of the relevant AEMD, specified in approved lists, with the exception of medical devices, which are paid in full or in part by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). This target benefit is received upon presentation of a medical document issued by the Medical Advisory Commissions (MACs), TEMC or NEMC, certifying the need of AEMD and their type, according to the specific needs of the disabled person. When assessing the right to target benefit for AEMD, the appointment by the medical expert body is fundamental - entered in an expert decision of TEMC/NEMC or protocol of MACs, which must comply with the medical conditions set out in Annex 2 of the Regulation for implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act.

The topic of the challenges related to the provision of AEMD has been discussed for many years in various formats, and the results and findings have shown the urgent need of this type of activity to be provided by health authorities, given that it is not inherent for the social assistance authorities - as is the practice in other countries of the European Union. This is the reason why the Government Management Program of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2017-2021 includes Measure 136: "Change of the mechanism of payment of target benefit for development/production, purchase and repair of aids, equipment and medical devices". In the implementation of the measure and after reaching a broad public consensus regarding the necessary actions for the realization of a significant change in the mechanism for financing and providing AEMD, during the development of the draft Persons with Disabilities Act the relevant proposals were made and adopted.

In this regard, specific regulations of the law were written, according to which the financing and providing of AEMD for people with disabilities to be carried out on the basis of a new mechanism and quality standards, developed and approved jointly by the Ministry of Health and NHIF, as of January 1, 2020. Given the complexity of the issue of financing and providing for AEMD, the entry into force of the new mechanism on 1 January 2020 has been postponed to 2021 in order to minimize the risk of reaching a situation where people with disabilities are deprived of the AEMD they need of.

According to the latest amendments to the Persons with Disabilities Act (from November 2020), the activities on financing and providing AEMD for people with disabilities will be transferred entirely to the NHIF until the end of 2021, whereby from the beginning of 2022 people with disabilities will be entitled to their AEMD, determined individually by a medical document issued by the MACs, TEMC or NEMC, based on their specific needs and according to specifications approved by NHIF. In this regard, all necessary actions will be taken to implement the activities provided by law. For the gradual transition of the activities for financing and providing AEMD to the healthcare system, a temporary procedure is regulated with certain specific deadlines in a regulation of the Act on NHIF's Budget for 2021. The latter regulates the mechanism of 01.01.2020 for payments to the respective traders or producers for the AEMD provided to the people with disabilities by the NHIF through the Social Assistance Agency, taking into account the granting of the target benefits on the basis of the conclusions from the individual needs assessment. The deadlines for the implementation of the procedures for determining the amount up to

which the NHIF pays AEMD for people with disabilities and for concluding individual contracts with the persons carrying out activities on providing and repair of these AEMD are regulated. This must take place no later than 31 December 2021.

In view of this and in accordance with the identified problems in the field, MLSP will focus its efforts on ensuring accessibility for people with permanent disabilities, allowing active social inclusion in the community and leading an independent lifestyle. The target benefit through NHIF is aimed at improving the quality of life on the basis of supports which to compensate functional deficits, viewed through the medical expertise prism. While **in respect of the started transition from medical to social model, the project activities aim to upgrade and approbate innovative measures for creating conditions for participation in the labor market, the educational system, etc.**

The project will enable access to mobility aids, assistive devices and technologies suitable for people with disabilities, in accordance with the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular Art. 19 Independent living and inclusion in the community and Art. 20 Personal mobility. The Convention requires the states to take appropriate measures to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access as others to all other facilities and services open or intended for the general public, and the implementation of project activities is in line with the implementation of this national commitment.

Our country ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with a law adopted by the 41st National Assembly on January 26, 2012, in force since April 21, 2012. International treaties ratified under the constitutional order, promulgated and entered into force for the Republic of Bulgaria, are part of the domestic law of the country. In this regard, the full implementation of the obligations arising from the Convention is of great importance. Following the defence of the first national report on the implementation of the Convention (held in Geneva in September 2018), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recommends Bulgaria to increase its efforts for enhancing personal mobility and enable access for people with disabilities to technical mobility aids, devices, equipment and medical devices that are accessible and/or free of charge, including by increasing the funds for them. In this regard, in the draft Action Plan for the implementation of the Final Recommendations to the Republic of Bulgaria, made by the UN Committee for the period 2021-2026, is included the provision of innovative, modern, high-quality and high-tech technical aids, incl. appropriate computer configuration; specialized software programs; electronic technical means to compensate the sense-perception deficit, adapted technical and medical devices and others, according to specific needs, as well as providing aids for creating an accessible environment related to mobility and free movement.

This is an effective measure to facilitate the personal mobility, access of people with permanent disabilities to quality modern mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies, as well as the providing of training for their use. The measure corresponds to the leading policies for promoting social inclusion outlined in the strategic documents and contributes in part to achieving the goals of increasing the opportunities for people with disabilities to have an independent life on an equal footing with others in an accessible environment and facilitating inclusion in the community, as well as to improve the access to quality inclusive healthcare, education, employment and appropriate working conditions, regional development and affordable quality services.

A contribution will be reported to the compliance with the accessibility requirements of European regulations, directives and standards regarding to the accessibility of the information and communication for people with disabilities and the possibilities for perceiving and facilitating the use of complementary and alternative means of communication.

This would lead to the desired and expected effectiveness, taking into account the complex and multifaceted nature of the measures to ensure full exercising of all rights and fundamental freedoms for people with disabilities.

For the next programming period, the focus of the future investments of ESF + is on the European Pillar of the Social Rights. It will lay the foundations for even more focused and effective efforts for equal opportunities, access to the labor market, fair working conditions, social protection, and inclusion. Specifically, Principle 17 of the Pillar proclaims the integration of people with disabilities.

The policy in the sphere of people with disabilities' rights is a multisectoral policy implemented not only through social policy instruments but also through other sectoral policies, including local and regional authorities, public social initiatives of the non-governmental sector, and the development of corporate social responsibility. The main accents of the policy in this field as a horizontal policy are related to the implementation of the sectoral policies in the field of the labor market, education, healthcare, transport and information technologies, regional development and others.

The planned measures will be complemented by initiatives implemented and funded, beyond the measures and funds set in the project.

A key prerequisite for effective implementation is the applying of an integrated approach.

The approach to integrated territorial development of the regions aims to develop a model of partnership and promote cooperation between the stakeholders at the local and regional level - both between local authorities and other organizations (representatives of business and civil society), which being led by a common goal, will work together to solve common problems or exploit the potential for developing the policy on the rights of people with disabilities in the relevant territory. The integrated approach is manifested through an appropriate combination of different projects/measures funded by different sources. In the implementation of integrated projects under the Integrated Territorial Investment Approach, opportunities will continue to be sought to support people with disabilities by providing them with an accessible environment and social infrastructure.

Opportunities will also be sought to finance the investment costs of persons producing and providing mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, taking into account all aspects of the mobility and accessibility for the people with disabilities, as well as funding research activity for the development and approbation of innovative technical aids and assistive technologies.

In addition, pursuant to Art. 53 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, people with disabilities have the right to equal access to the physical living environment, as well as to all other amenities and public services in the urbanized territories. The rules and norms (minimum standards) for accessibility and universal design of the elements of the accessible environment in the urbanized territory and of the respective buildings and facilities are determined by an ordinance of the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works.

Identifying the synergy between individual assessment and working capacity expertise

would help to ensure the full participation of the people with disabilities in the community by including them into the labor market (based on an assessment of the need of support when exercising the labor right, and on the other hand, what work can be done according to the residual functionality). In this regard, the aim is to encourage the activity of the people with disabilities, to increase their motivation and this would contribute to the reduction of public resources in the social sphere through the efficient and targeted allocation of budgetary resources.

In particular, digitalization and technological progress create a favorable basis for supporting the training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and all measures in this area, incl. the providing of innovative, modern and high-quality aids and programs contribute to the digital transition.

Given the emergency situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic at the international level, which caused direct negative socio-economic consequences, disrupted the economic development trend through job loss, rising the rate of unemployment, causing difficulties for small and large businesses, lack of income, a vague perspective for households, and many others, there is one social group that needs special attention through support measures, namely the people with permanent disabilities. It is important to note that people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable to coronavirus infection and severely affected by the pandemic. This is because, in the first place, a significant part of this vulnerable group is a carrier of a number of comorbidities that increase the risk of deteriorating health. Secondly, people with the most severe disabilities are physically dependent on their assistants, family and relatives. The majority of people with disabilities are seriously affected by the force majeure circumstances and at risk of social isolation, which could deepen and have a negative impact on their psychological condition. Last but not least, these are some of the prerequisites for deterioration of the social status of individuals.

The implementation of the project will create opportunities for increasing personal development and independent living and improving the chances for inclusion of people with disabilities in the education system and professional realization in the labor market by providing high quality and high-tech technical aids, devices, equipment and specialized software programs; creating an accessible environment related to mobility and free movement, and/or the necessary technological renewal/adaptation/equipment, according to individual needs.

Accessibility and mobility support the opportunities for inclusion in the labor market, and the work and social integration, as a whole, are inextricably linked. The growth in employment of this target group would reflect positively on the economy and sustainable economic development, taking into account that income increasing is linked to the consumption increasing. It affects the tax and social security system, generating revenues for the state budget and gives a positive effect on business. This allows some segregation in terms of social policy as a whole and reduces the establishment of permanent dependence on relevant social support.

After the completion of the project activities, opportunities will be sought to continue funding the initiative taken to support the accessibility and mobility of people with disabilities in order to increase their suitability for social inclusion and long-term sustainability.

<p>11. Does the project contribute to the development of any aspect of sustainable economic development? Please describe how.</p>
<p>Ensuring accessibility. Stimulating innovations. Improving the quality of life. The implementation of the activities under the proposed project will have a long-term effect on the development of people with disabilities' social potential. The awareness on the importance of ensuring accessibility and mobility, with a view to enabling people with disabilities to take full advantage of all their rights and fundamental freedoms, helps to ensure their participation in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres of public life. In addition, those who produce and provide aids, devices and assistive technologies will be encouraged, taking into account certain aspects of the people with disabilities' mobility. In this way, the development and implementation of innovative techniques and technologies will be supported, incl. diagnostics and approbation of a new market niche. Stimulating innovations is a prerequisite for improving the quality of life. Unlocking the potential of the economy based on building an inclusive digital information society by ensuring equal access to modern, efficient and high-quality digital technologies, applications and services, will continue to be a key driver for sustainable economic growth. This will support and improve the social inclusion of people with disabilities, including in the field of employment, in order to make them feel worthy and full-value citizens. Through the skilful use of the means created in the process of digital transformation, the state policy in the field of the rights of people with disabilities gets opportunities to improve the quality of life and increase the efficiency level. The realization of this project is such an opportunity. The full participation of people with disabilities in economic and social life is essential for the reform that has been launched in order to succeed in achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth throughout our society.</p>
<p>12. Does the project contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the National Development Program BULGARIA 2030? Please describe how.</p>
<p>The project will contribute to achieving the objectives of the National Development Program BULGARIA 2030, in particular, Priority 11 Social inclusion with aspects set in the field of the policy on the rights of people with disabilities to outline a horizontal approach to support the social inclusion of this social group. The main goal of the priority is the active social inclusion of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities. These activities provide an effort to enhance the level of economic activity and employment of people with reduced mobility by promoting mobility and accessibility. The implementation of the project is expected to have an effect on one of the leading areas of impact to Priority 11, sub-priority "Inclusion of vulnerable groups", namely - Accessible environment of living.</p>

13. Does the project contribute to the implementation of the objectives and priorities set out in the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan? If yes, please describe how.

When developing this project idea, the recommendations and conclusions have been taken into account, according to the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030.

The use of new techniques and technologies creates preconditions for energy efficiency and environmental protection, and the implementation of the project activities will partially contribute to the realization of Bulgaria's energy efficiency goals - incl. energy savings.

The project proposal is in line with and does not contradict the principles of DNSH, as it would not lead to harm to the environment.