

## Introduction

The Rehabilitation Centre of People with Physical Disabilities (in Hungarian: Mozgássérült Emberek Rehabilitációs Központja, MEREK, [www.merek.hu](http://www.merek.hu)) is a national organisation active in the complex rehabilitation of people with physical disabilities, among them people with severe physical and multiple disabilities. MEREK launched its EU-funded national programme named Gurulo (“Rolling”, [www.gurulo.hu](http://www.gurulo.hu)) in September, 2008, with the main goal to enhance the social and labour market integration of people with physical disabilities through the establishment of a national network of regional workshops aimed at the development of assistive technology and special sports equipment. The programme is carried out in the framework of the Social Renewal Operative Programme (TÁMOP 1.4.2) of the New Hungary Development Plan.

The potentials of social and labour market integration for people with physical disabilities are highly effected by the usefulness and quality of assistive tools they use. The maintenance and individual adaptation of these items are services hardly available in Hungary.

The goal of establishing a network of workshops is to ensure the local availability of such services for the users of assistive tools. Already we created one workshop per region, thus realising seven new units altogether by the end of 2010. We hired previously unemployed people with physical disabilities, thus supporting their labour market and social integration.

Another goal of the programme is to create a network of civil and government organisations that is able to effectively support the integration of people with disabilities. For this we are looking for partners both at the local and national level.

The project was started in September, 2008 and it is proposed to last until March, 2012. The workshops will continue to operate afterwards.

## • Summary

The general level of employment in Hungary decreased dramatically in the 1990ies, and this had a severe effect on the labour market participation of people with disabilities. The difference in the employment of non-disabled people and people

with disabilities was considerable even in 1990 with 44% of the non-disabled population being employed compared with just 17% of people with disabilities. The changes in the labour market decreased even this small figure to the present 9% (the latest official figure, as of 2002). The lowest level of employment is observed in the case of people with physical disabilities, 6,3%, while the percentage of inactive people is the highest at 79,1%. One of the factors resulting in such bad employment figures is the use of non-suitable assistive tools as well as the lack of complex rehabilitation services. Therefore our main goal is to establish a national service that adapts assistive tools to the individual needs of users. This means the individual setup of the best suitable assistive equipment that requires the least energy from its user. We believe that through the use of suitable assistive tools the chances of employment of people with disabilities and their capacity to keep their workplace increase considerably.

Mass-produced products are just as not suitable to most people with physical disabilities as manufactured clothing to people without disabilities. There are workshops in several European countries that are able to adapt or even manufacture assistive tools to individual needs based on professional personal analysis. These items are secure, comfortable and are used on their own while making the best contribution to the independence and working ability of people with physical disabilities.

Our professionals at MEREK often meet assistive tools adapted by the users themselves to their personal needs. These are often of bad quality or lack professional workmanship. Fortunately there is a growing demand for personally adapted assistive equipment on behalf of both professionals and people with disabilities. These are produced in well-equipped workshops based on the previous survey and professional suggestion of rehabilitation experts.

Professionals at MEREK answered this challenge already in 2005 when they created the assistive tools' and sports' equipment workshop with the help of a Phare grant. Experiences gained from the operation of the workshop show that there is a growing national demand for assistive technology and special sports equipment backed by rehabilitation services.

Our goal is that the services of our workshop become available nationwide. In order to achieve this we plan to establish altogether seven regional workshops as well as a methodological and development centre in Budapest. In the workshops we create new workplaces for people with disabilities.

It is very important that the adaptation and maintenance of assistive and sports equipment be based on a personal examination of the client by rehabilitation experts. The theoretical and practical training of rehabilitation experts as well as the dissemination of ICF (International Classification of Functions and Disability) methodology are natural components of the project. We hope that we can make effective relationships with similar organisations of other EU-member countries in order to further develop methodology and services.

Direct target groups of the project are people with disabilities using assistive aids as well as rehabilitation and social professionals and medical experts. We are also aiming to create an independent non-profit operational model through the complex use of sales income and the presently available government subsidies.

## 2. Project goals

### General goals:

1. Make the service, rent and adaptation of assistive tools available to people with physical disabilities.
2. Extend services to individual adaptations based on personal needs.
3. Train of rehabilitation professionals and other experts working in the provision, retail trade and maintenance of assistive tools.
4. Enhance the independence of people with disabilities through the supply of suitable assistive tools in order to increase their potential in the labour market.
5. Increase the level of employment of people with disabilities.

### Practical goals:

1. Establish an assistive technology and special sports equipment workshop in all 7 regions of the country (already achieved by the end of 2010).
2. Ensure the servicing background of assistive tools and special sports equipment.

3. Long-term employment of at least 30 people with disabilities after complex training (people have been hired and they are currently in their training).
4. Create partnerships with rehabilitation and sports organisations, interest groups of people with disabilities ensuring the dissemination and sustainability of services.
5. Disseminate ICF methodology to rehabilitation experts through training (a nationwide training programme in all the 19 counties is currently in progress).
6. Raise the awareness of people with disabilities to make use of the rehabilitation services of the workshops and the members of the network.
7. Increase the labour market potential of people with disabilities through our services.
8. Create international partnerships in the field of development and commerce of assistive technology in order to ensure the exchange of expertise and effective operation.
9. Disseminate experiences and results gained from the project.

### 3. Characteristics of regional workshops

As an important goal the project is enhancing the employment of people with disabilities currently unemployed and living in the particular region. In all workshops we employ the following colleagues:

- One workshop leader (with a technical qualification, full-time),
- Three full-time mechanics,
- Physical therapist (half time),
- Orthopaedist (half time).

Our workshops are characterized by the following:

- Location: where the most potential clients live in a region.
- The local availability of complex rehabilitation services and experts supporting the service.
- Accessible services and an easy approach from all places in the region.

#### 4. Achievements made so far (as of January, 2011)

- All 7 workshops have been opened with employees chosen and trained.
- Further development of ICF methodology achieved.
- 3 international trips carried out, many international relationships created with foreign suppliers and producers as well as professional ties with Hungarian organisations.
- Use of a pressure mapping device introduced into evaluation practice.
- Maintenance and personal adaptation of assistive tools started at social institutions and on a private basis.
- Adjustable measure-taking seat module invented and produced to assist personal evaluation.
- Courses in ICF and in assistive tools carried out in all county seats of Hungary.
- Participation at international conferences, professional publications.
- Preparations are already in progress to continue the project after 2012.
- National dissemination and appearance in the media.