



Economic Implications of Chronic Illness and Disability in Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union

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Disability is an important issue for the transition countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Not only is a significant portion of their population either in poor health or disabled--with implications for labor force participation and productivity--but their aging demographics project an increase in the share of disabled people, raising concerns about the sustainability of social protection programs. Thus, if these heavily resource-strapped countries fail to deal in an efficient manner with disability and health issues in their population, they could face serious challenges to their efforts to achieve stronger economic growth and improved living standards.

Because the economic drivers and costs of poor health status and disabilities in this region are not well documented, *Economic Implications of Chronic Illness and Disability in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* aims to close this gap by leveraging household survey data from a large number of transition countries, analyzing the poverty-disability relationship and the linkages between disability and employment, earnings, children's school enrollments, and adults' time-use patterns.

Altogether, disability appears to have stronger negative effects on the economic and social well-being of the population in these countries as compared with industrialized countries. The main reasons are the prevalence of a large informal sector, the relatively weak targeting performance of the existing social assistance programs, and the lack of broad-based insurance mechanisms to protect individuals against loss of income due to unexpected illnesses.

Addressing these weaknesses is the challenge facing policy makers and the population at large in the region, through the definition and enactment of a deep, well-coordinated, cross-sectoral reform agenda. This book will be useful for policy makers and development officials working to improve living standards in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

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