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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORY
Made by the Disabled, for the Disabled

Introducing wheelchairs made by local users to regional markets

Photo: USAID/Jay Sorensen

U.S. official Mark Taplin visits the new wheelchair factory near Bucharest.

At the heart of USAID's effort to help people with limited mobility lies the belief that the right to fair and equal treatment is not selective, but applies to every man, woman, and child.

Romanians and other Central and Eastern Europeans who suffer from impaired mobility often lack access to equipment that would increase their mobility and independence. In a region with scarce rehabilitation services and where imported mobility equipment is far too expensive for most, USAID is supporting an effort to make locally produced wheelchairs available to those who need them.

With help from USAID, the Motivation Romania Foundation has opened a new wheelchair production factory. "The opening of any factory is a sign of a country's economic growth. But ... this factory is special. Its products will provide people who today may live in isolation with the tangible means to leave that isolation behind and to physically join in the life of their communities," said Mark Taplin, U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires, during the factory's official opening.

A unique aspect about the Foundation is that the wheelchairs are designed and built by users. Each wheelchair is then tailored to best meet the needs of each user. These efforts empower those facing disabilities to enable each other to overcome challenges. The foundation has built and distributed more than 1,500 wheelchairs in Romania and the neighboring Republic of Moldova.

In addition to wheelchairs, the foundation also provides health education, vocational training, and counseling to its beneficiaries. USAID also supports advocacy activities for social and professional integration, such as reintegration assistance for adults and children with disabilities, driving school, and wheelchair sports development. USAID is now helping other countries in the region set up their own workshops for producing wheelchairs and other mobility equipment.

Telling Our Story
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