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From Education to Practice: Physiotherapists with Visual Impairments in Socialist Serbia

INTRODUCTION

Vocational training and the employment of persons with visual impairments in socialist Serbia underwent significant changes after World War II. In the first postwar years, due to wartime devastation and the country's reconstruction, attention was directed towards rebuilding existing institutions and centres and organising workshops and vocational courses to train persons with visual impairments for work. However, the vocational courses were short, especially those that trained individuals for occupations within the spectrum of traditional

"blind" trades, such as brush making, basket weaving, spinning, and weaving, which were no longer in demand in the broader market.[1] Therefore, already from the 1950s, alongside major changes in the political and socio-economic life of Yugoslavia and Serbia, efforts were made – particularly by the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia – to develop new educational models to expand the limited number of occupations available to persons with visual impairments. Their goal was to prepare them as well as possible for participation in the labour market characterised by socialist modernisation.[2]

International experience has shown that people with visual impairments can be successfully trained and employed in therapeutic professions, such as massage and physiotherapy. For Yugoslavia and Serbia, Western experiences were particularly significant, although persons with visual impairments had practiced therapeutic professions in the East for centuries, especially in China and Japan. Among European countries, England and France were the first to train "blind" people as masseurs at the end of the nineteenth century, and later as physiotherapists. Other countries followed the same trend in the development of these professions somewhat later. Schools were soon established as well. Thus, for example, in Great Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were already around fifty certified "blind" and partially sighted masseurs, who were later called physiotherapists. The Association of the Blind was transformed into the National Institute for Blind Physiotherapists (1914), which later changed its name and operated as a segregated institution for the education of "blind" and partially sighted physiotherapists.[3] It developed into one of the best schools for training "blind" and partially sighted physiotherapists, and individuals from all over the world were educated there. Researchers state that by 1987, approximately 900 individuals had graduated from the school.[4] The World Wars stimulated the expansion of the massage and physiotherapy professions worldwide, both because of the large number of persons with severe war injuries and because of the increased number of people who had become "blind".[5]

At the beginning of the 1950s, half a century after the aforementioned European experiences, the process of organised education for "blind" physiotherapists and

1 Miloš Ličina, "Profesionalno osposobljavanje slepih," *Socijalna misao,* No. 2 (februar 1961): 55, 56.

2 Dragana Gundogan and Nataša Milićević, "Segregated Special Education for Visually Impaired Children in Socialist Serbia – Isolationand/or Preparation for Life and Work?,"*Prispevki za zanovejšo zgodovino* 55, No. 2 (2025): 192–94.

3 Sally French, "Visually Impaired Physiotherapists: Their Struggle for Acceptance and Survival," *Disability & Society*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1995): 3–6, accessed on 19 January 2025, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09687599550023697.

4 Ibidem, 3.

5 Ibid., 6–7. Sally French, *Disabled People and Employment: A Study of the Working Lives of Visually Impaired Physiotherapists* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 76–78.

the introduction of a new profession for people with visual impairments began in socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia. This not only opened new opportunities for the education and employment of this group but also gave them access to a field of health services that had been completely inaccessible until then. As emphasised in the mid-1980s, this represented a "major breakthrough into new working and creative spaces".[6] This breakthrough also had lasting results, visible even today, not only in secondary but also in higher education. Evidence of this is that, in 2019, the first "blind" female student enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine in Novi Sad in the field of physiatry.[7]

In Serbian historiography, this topic has not been the subject of research.[8] Historians of education have not documented these important changes. Their focus has been on general development trends and measurable indicators of progress in education.[9] Nevertheless, their works are useful for the broader context in which this new profession for persons with visual impairments was introduced. A similar situation exists for sociologists and special educators, who are more focused on contemporary trends and the introduction of inclusion in education and society.[10] Certain insights have been provided by works on the history of "blind" persons in Serbia and Yugoslavia, which have only touched upon the vocational education of physiotherapists.[11]

6 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Dr Jelena Simeunović, "Obrazovanje fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida," referat izložen na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5. –7. 11. 1987, Beograd.

7 Angelina Čakširan, "Prva je slepa studentkinja u istoriji Medicinskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu i jedina na svetu koja bez čula vida radi na grnčarskom točku. Otkrila nam je kako prevazilazi prepreke koje se čine nesavladive," *Blic,* 9 January 2020, accessed on 3 November 2025, https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/, "VID SAM IZGUBILA, ALI SUZU NISAM PUSTILA". Nataša je prva slepa studentkinja Medicinskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu, ali jedna stvar je čini JEDINSTVENOM NA PLANETI, Blic.

8 See Predrag J. Marković, Miloš Ković, and Nataša Milićević, "Historiography in Serbia. Developments since 1989," in: Ulf Brunnbauer, ed., *(Re) Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism* (Münster: LitVerlag 2004): 277–316. Predrag J. Marković and Nataša Milićević, "Serbian Historiography in the Time of Transition: A Struggle for Legitimacy," *Istorija 20. veka*, No. 1 (2007): 145–66.

9 See Dragomir Bondžić, "Prosveta i nauka u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji 1945–1990," *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2008), 390–436. Aleksandra Ilić Rajković and Sanja Petrović Todosijević, eds., *Bez škole šta bi mi?! Ogledi iz istorije obrazovanja u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji od 19. veka do danas* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2021). Miroslav Perišić, *Od Staljina ka Sartru. Formiranje jugoslovenske inteligencije na evropskim univerzitetima* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2008). Sanja Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije: pregled istorijskog razvoja opšte i srpske tiflopedagogije* (Beograd: Univerzitet u Beogradu–Fakultet za specijalnu edukaciju i rehabilitaciju, 2012).

10 Tomislav Bogavac, *Školstvo u Srbijina putu do reforme (razvoj škola 1945–1975*) (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, Centar za sociološka istraživanja, 1980). Pavlović, *Istorija tiflopedagogije*. Radomir Arsić and Ljubica Isaković, "Special pedagogy and its development in Serbia," *KNOWLEDGE–International Journal* (2019): 345–51. Nikola Baketa and Dragana Gundogan, "Inclusion of the Roma in Croatia and Serbia: the institutional framework and its implementation," in: Nikoleta Gutvajn and Milja Vujačić, eds., *Challenges and perspectives of inclusive education* (Belgrade: Institute for educational research, 2016): 119–36.

11 Đorđe Žutić and Petrović Žika, *Škola– put u život* (Beograd: Savez slepih Jugoslavije, 1959). *Slepi u Jugoslaviji* (Zagreb: Tiflološki muzej Saveza slijepih Jugoslavije, 1979). Đorđe Vukotić, *Graditelji svog*

Our aim in this research, which has not previously been conducted, is to analyse the educational and employment processes of people with visual impairments in socialist Serbia. It is examined through three main questions: What was the organisation of vocational training in physiotherapy? How did the process of employment and professional engagement unfold? What were the main challenges, obstacles, and struggles that individuals and institutions faced, and how did they resolve them? Answering these questions helps partially fill the existing gap in Serbian historiography. Methodologically, the paper relies on rich archival material, primarily from the Archives of the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia. For "blind" and partially sighted people, this topic was of vital importance, which is why the archive contains numerous documents on many aspects of their education and work. Perhaps, from an original-source perspective, the least documented is the initial period of schooling and the introduction to the profession itself. Significant information is also provided by petitions submitted by persons with visual impairments to various institutions in which they sought employment. Biographies of physiotherapists with visual impairments should also be included, such as that of Dr Novak Ražnatović, which also includes his presentations and opinions on the state of vocational education for people with visual impairments.

SHIFTING THE BOUNDARIES IN EDUCATION: THE SCHOOL FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PHYSIOTHERAPISTS (MASSEURS)

The first years after World War II were neither economically nor socially favourable for the introduction of therapeutic professions for "blind" and partially sighted persons, but the changes that took place in the country during the 1950s were far more favourable. Researchers emphasise 1950 as a year that changed many things. Some historians, such as Dr Miroslav Perišić, rightly call it "the year of a great turning point". This transformation was not only foreign-political – a shift towards the West – but also internal and political. It was also a shift in cultural and educational policy. From that time on, efforts were made to enable as many experts as possible from all fields to travel abroad and visit the most important centres in the West. In this way, they had a chance to become acquainted with individuals and institutions, to learn new methods of work, and to bring back fresh ideas. This involved breaking previous ideological boundaries and formal obstacles, as well as demonstrating readiness to adopt certain Western

života: Slepi Beograda 1941–1981 (Beograd: Savez slepih Beograda, 1984). Đorđe Tutić and Živko Kotarac, *Priručnik o rehabilitaciji defektne dece i omladine, njihovom školovanju i zapošljavanju sa odgovarajućim obrascima* (Beograd: Savremena administracija, 1963).

models in the functioning, planning, and implementation of particular educational and cultural programmes.[12]

On the other hand, changes in economic and social relations and in the country's material capacities further influenced the education and employment of people with visual impairments. This encouraged the reorganisation of certain institutions for the vocational training of people with visual impairments, such as the workshops of the Association of the Blind. They were transformed into centres for professional rehabilitation and institutions for training in industrial work. Instead of courses, schools began to be organised, as with telephone operators. New schools were also opened. This increased the number of educational institutions, enabling a broader range of occupations for more people with visual impairments. It increased their chances of finding better employment in the labour market and of securing their livelihood.[13]

Within this framework, the idea of introducing physiotherapy as a new profession for people with visual impairments emerged. What had previously seemed impossible for this group became a reality, bringing Serbian and Yugoslav people with visual impairments into contact with broader European and global trends in education and work. However, this idea was not entirely new in the Yugoslav and Serbian context. The first "blind" Yugoslavs were trained as masseurs during World War I in Bizerte.[14] Later, in the mid-1920s, Veljko Ramadanović attempted to introduce this profession. Three students from the School for the Blind in Zemun completed a massage course at the Orthopedic Institute in Belgrade. However, the initiative stalled there, as social and economic conditions were unfavourable and resistance was strong.[15]

The new attempt after the war proved fruitful. Great credit belongs to Dr Vojin Smodlaka, a well-known expert in sports medicine and, at the time, director of the State Institute for Physical Culture in Belgrade. He initiated the introduction of a new profession for people with visual impairments. For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that the same idea had been suggested a year earlier by Dr Jozo Budak, a specialist in physical medicine, to representatives of the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia. At that time, it was not implemented due to financial constraints.[16] The new opportunity was seized when it was proposed

12 Miroslav Perišić, "Veliki zaokret 1950: Jugoslavija u traganju za vlastitim putem. Kultura–oslonac, prethodnica i sastavni deo spoljne politike," in: Mile Bjelajac, ed, *Pisati istoriju Jugoslavije. Viđenje srpskog faktora* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2007), 245.

13 Ličina, "Profesionalno osposobljavanje slepih," 56. *Životi rad slepih Srbije* (Beograd: Savez slepih Srbije, 1967), 19, 20.

14 Vukotić, *Graditelji svog života,* 152.

15 Ibid., 152.

16 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Uvodni referat Borislave Kanački na Prvom savetovanju slepih fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije 24.–25. 10. 1969. u Krapinskim Toplicama.

by Dr Smodlaka, a man of extraordinary energy and persistence, as testified by his autobiography.[17] He was prepared not only to accept new ideas but also to implement them despite difficulties. At the Congress of Sports Medicine Physicians in Paris in 1951, he noticed a large number of "blind" physiotherapists. According to sources, this was a "real discovery" for him. He realised that this profession had "prospects" for this group and that, in addition to being delicate, it was also profitable. He then familiarised himself with their educational methods and employment opportunities in detail. He also visited the school in Paris and learned about its organisation, curriculum, and programme.[18]

Founding a similar school in Serbian and Yugoslav society was not easy. There was significant resistance and opposition from numerous medical experts and certain institutions. The opposition appears to have been particularly pronounced at the State Institute for Physical Culture. Dr Smodlaka does not write about it, nor about his own participation in this undertaking, which is particularly interesting. Nevertheless, indirectly, in speaking about the postwar situation at the Institute, he testified that there was very strong resistance to admitting students with physical "deficiencies or disabilities" to the Faculty of Physical Culture. He was among several physicians and medical experts who held the opposite view.[19] It was necessary to overcome deeply rooted prejudices and ignorance about what "blind" persons could do in physical medicine. Finally, under the name School for Blind Physiotherapists (Masseurs), the school began operating in early February 1952 within the Institute for Sports Medicine of the State Institute for Physical Culture.[20]

The curriculum, prepared by the Institute for Sports Medicine, comprised a theoretical component (two years) and a practical component (one year). In addition to general education subjects, it included professional courses such as anatomy, physiology, pathology, internal medicine, kinesitherapy, electrotherapy, and massage.[21] It was supported by the Ministries of Health and Education, as evidenced by the school's status under the general regulations governing schools.[22] The first generation consisted of eleven students with prior primary education. All of them, except one who withdrew for health reasons, completed their studies

17 Dr Vojin Smodlaka, *Autobiografija. Život, rad i razmišljanja jednog srpskog sportskog lekara* (Beograd –Njujork: Prof. Dr Vojin Smodlaka, Srpsko društvo za istoriju fizičke kulture, 1999).

18 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Božidar Đokić, Imbro Kovačević, Novak Ražnatović, "35 godina obrazovanja slepih i slabovidih lica za poziv fizioterapeuta u Jugoslaviji," referat na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. u Beogradu.

19 Smodlaka, *Autobiografija*, 164.

20 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Božidar Đokić, Imbro Kovačević, Novak Ražnatović, "35 godina obrazovanja slepih i slabovidih lica za poziv fizioterapeuta u Jugoslaviji," referat na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. u Beogradu.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

in 1955 after three years. The students came from various parts of Yugoslavia – four from Serbia, four from Croatia, and three from Slovenia. As with its republican structure, the students' gender balance was also even (five women and six men). Notably, at the time, these masseurs found employment quickly and easily in healthcare institutions throughout the country.[23]

With the founding of this first school for physiotherapists with visual impairments, not only were the boundaries in the education of these persons shifted, but many other social boundaries regarding the abilities and possibilities of "blind" and partially sighted persons were also moved. Persons with visual impairments were given the opportunity to be employed in healthcare centres and to participate in professional work alongside their colleagues without visual impairments. Moreover, this first generation "paved the way for new generations", which was an extraordinarily important step in the life and work of "blind" and partially sighted persons in Serbia and Yugoslavia. This applied not only to those who enrolled in the school but to the entire group of persons with visual impairments. The very fact that a career as a physiotherapist existed for "blind" persons empowered them and opened new educational and employment opportunities that had not previously existed.

BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND CONTESTATION: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES AND ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION, 1962–THE 1980S

The aforementioned successes in educating "blind" physiotherapists encouraged the Association of the Blind to establish, in 1956, a Department for Blind Physiotherapists within a Secondary Medical School, rather than keeping the programme within the State Institute for Physical Culture.[24] This was important because their education was now linked to a medical school. Moreover, it provided an organised, clearly defined system into which the Department could integrate and operate effectively. At the same time, the education of "blind" physiotherapists was raised to the level of a full four-year secondary school programme.[25] The curriculum, in scope and content, corresponded to that of other departments of the school. The medical school itself had qualified teaching staff and a well-organised system of student training. The content and scope of specialised professional subjects were significantly expanded, inevitably necessitating a change

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 *Službeni list FNRJ,* br. 22, septembar 1957.

to the diploma title. The diploma no longer bore the title of masseur but that of physiotherapist.[26] In this way, the profession of physiotherapist gained full affirmation. Certain data indicate that in the first five years after its establishment, 53 male and female students graduated from the school.[27] Among them was the recognised expert Novak Ražnatović, who worked for many years at the Special Orthopaedic Surgical Hospital "Banjica".[28] Physiotherapists with visual impairments considered this second generation of graduates among the most competent professionals in their field.[29]

This department existed in this organisational form until 1962, when it became a separate boarding School for Blind Physiotherapy Technicians.[30] Its separation as an independent school resulted from various problems within the medical school and dissatisfaction among teachers. Among the most important issues were the school administration's inability to maintain full oversight of the department's work, teachers' unwillingness to travel to the boarding facility to teach classes, and the distance of the boarding home for students with visual impairments, where part of the instruction was delivered.[31]

In a very short time, it became clear that establishing an independent school for physiotherapy technicians with visual impairments was not a viable solution. The school had abandoned a well-established medical school system, so it was unable to quickly build a solid internal organization. For example, it soon encountered serious staff, organisational, and material difficulties. Most of its teachers were employed temporarily, which complicated its work. At the turn of the 1970s, the principal himself was more often on sick leave than at his workplace. Furthermore, the school was temporarily housed in a building not designed for that purpose. This meant it did not have sufficient capacity to educate and accommodate, for example, the 73 students enrolled in 1968, of whom 58 came from other republics, and 15 were from Belgrade. It had no courtyard, so students spent most of the day either in classrooms or on a nearby street with heavy

26 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Božidar Đokić, Imbro Kovačević, Novak Ražnatović, "35 godina obrazovanja slepih i slabovidih lica za poziv fizioterapeuta u Jugoslaviji," referat na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. u Beogradu.

27 Tutić and Kotarac, *Priručnik o rehabilitaciji*, 58.

28 Verica Živadinović, *Impuls socijalnoj uključenosti: novinarska beležnica* (Kragujevac: NIGDP "Svetlost", 2006), 139.

29 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Božidar Đokić, Imbro Kovačević, Novak Ražnatović, "35 godina obrazovanja slepih i slabovidih lica za poziv fizioterapeuta u Jugoslaviji," referat na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. u Beogradu.

30 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Izveštaj direktora Škole za slepe fizioterapijske tehničare – Saveznom odboru SSJ, 21. 1. 1969.

31 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Božidar Đokić, Imbro Kovačević, Novak Ražnatović, "35 godina obrazovanja slepih i slabovidih lica za poziv fizioterapeuta u Jugoslaviji," referat na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. u Beogradu.

traffic. The school did not meet basic health standards. For example, sanitary and hygienic conditions were very poor: 22 female students were housed in 60 square metres, with only one shower available.[32]

From 1968 onwards, the Association of the Blind, as a school founder, could no longer finance the school because it was legally prohibited from using funds received from the Yugoslav Lottery for educational and cultural purposes. Therefore, funding was largely provided by the Belgrade and Republic Association of Education, while a smaller portion – particularly for boarding accommodation – came through payments made by the students themselves (scholarships) from the municipalities from which they originated.[33] Notably, due to poor relations between teachers and students and increased financial contributions through these payments, a one-day student strike occurred in February 1968.[34] It should also be noted that the admission criteria had changed – by the early 1960s, they were no longer as strict as before, resulting in the enrolment of students who were insufficiently prepared for the profession. This was reflected in the growing number of applicants. Sources record that interest in enrolment consistently exceeded available accommodation capacity. The planned number of enrolments was 70, yet over 10 additional applicants applied regularly.[35] From 1959 to 1967, 106 students graduated from the school. The highest numbers of graduates were recorded in 1959 (15), 1963 (14), and 1966 (18). By republic of origin, the largest numbers came from Croatia (32) and Serbia (27), while there were between 10 and 13 graduates from each of the remaining republics.[36]

However, the school was not sufficiently open to the profession for which it trained personnel, which contributed to unfavourable opinions about its work. Scepticism in professional circles stemmed both from the view that the school did not prepare sufficiently qualified staff and from prejudices towards "blind" people in this profession. This placed students in an unfavourable position, especially upon graduation, when they were expected to enter the workforce. The school did not provide the knowledge it was expected to, and its reputation declined, along with the value of its diploma. The question arose as to whether the school should remain as it was – training physiotherapy technicians and masseurs, or

32 AJ SSJ, 817, R–19, Informacija o stanju i problemima Medicinske škole za fizioterapeutske tehničare u Beogradu, 3. 3. 1969. AJ, SSJ, 817, R–19, Predlog za rešavanje problema Medicinske škole za fizioterapeutske tehničare u Beogradu koji su pripremili Petar Vukas, direktor škole i Borivoje Novičić, direktor Zavoda 9. 5. 1969.

33 Ibid.

34 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Informacija Gradskog sekretarijata za obrazovanje i kulturu – Saveznom odboru SSJ, 26. 9. 1969.

35 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Izveštaj direktora Petra Vukasa o radu škole – Saveznom odboru SSJ, 11. 8. 1968; AS, SSJ 817, R–17, Zapisnik sa sastanka Prve komisije za statusna pitanja slepih fizioterapeuta, 19. 2. 1987.

36 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Izveštaj direktora Petra Vukasa o radu škole – Saveznom odboru SSJ, 11. 8. 1968.

perhaps something else. For that reason, the curriculum was approved only temporarily, pending a more permanent solution.[37] In addition, healthcare institutions employing "blind" physiotherapy technicians expressed objections to the professional profile and to the students. On the other hand, the students themselves raised the issue of higher education, seeking to secure better employment opportunities.[38] This raised the question of their further education within this school.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, professional debates centred on how to organise the school, as it was clear it could no longer function in its existing form. At the initiative of the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia, two commissions were established, comprising experts in physical medicine and rehabilitation. The first commission addressed the education of physiotherapists with visual impairments, while the second examined the state of secondary and higher education for persons with visual impairments. Both commissions brought together experts from across Yugoslavia and therefore had a federal character.[39] Numerous meetings were held to resolve the issue of "blind" physiotherapists and to include them in education at the Higher Medical School in Belgrade. Some experts were even sent to Great Britain and France to study their organisational solutions.[40]

At the same time, opinions were sought from various institutions, including republican and provincial organisations of the "blind", educational institutions, various institutes and professional associations (defectological, physiotherapy, and others), and similar bodies. Some supported higher education for students with visual impairments, while others – such as associations of physiotherapists without visual impairments – were explicitly opposed. Within physiotherapy circles, for example, it was emphasised that "blind" physiotherapists equipped with assistive devices could perform only a small portion of electrotherapy procedures; that they could make a full contribution in massage; but that they should not be directed towards higher education "so as not to create unrealistic expectations of completely equal efficiency in the work of sighted and blind physiotherapists".[41]

37 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Informacija Gradskog sekretarijata za obrazovanje i kulturu – Saveznomo dboru SSJ, 26. 9. 1969.

38 Ibid.

39 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Informacija Saveznog odbora SSJ o školovanju slepih fizioterapeuta i stručnom obrazovanju slepih lica – Republičkim i pokrajinskim organizacijama Saveza i Zavodima za slepu decu i omladinu, 11. 5. 1971. AJ, SSJ 817, R–19, Zahtev Saveznog odbora SSJ za ukidanje Medincinske škole za fizioterapijske tehničare i njeno pripajanje jednoj od srednjih medicinskih škola–Izvršnom veću Socijalističke Republike Srbije 14. 8. 1972.

40 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Kratka informacija Saveznog odbora SSJ o do sada preduzetim merama otvorenih i aktuelnih pitanja slepih fizioterapeuta, 16. 10. 1970.

41 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Mišljenje stručnjaka fizikalne medicine VI fizioterapijskih dana održanih u organizaciji Srpskog lekarskog društva o pismu Saveznog odbora SSJ u vezi sa školovanjem slepih fizioterapeuta na Višoj medicinskoj školi, 8. 12. 1969.

On the other hand, representatives of the Higher Medical School in Belgrade were not particularly interested in including "blind" persons in the educational process, although they participated in efforts to make this possible and even assisted in drafting a curriculum for opening a special department at the Higher Medical School in Belgrade, planned for the 1972/73 school year.[42]

Within associations of "blind" persons, there was even discussion of the "overproduction" of physiotherapists, and questions were raised about their employment prospects.[43] This had some basis, since it was expected that, in competition with physiotherapists without visual impairments, many "blind" physiotherapists would be unable to find employment in the profession for which they had been trained. Nevertheless, from the perspective of physiotherapists without visual impairments, the issue was not only one of prejudice and misunderstanding of what "blind" physiotherapists were capable of, but also of the overall increase in the number of physiotherapists, which created a need for physiotherapists without visual impairments to preserve jobs for themselves.

The aforementioned meetings and discussions did not yield results. Working conditions at the school, increasingly strict criteria in secondary education, and growing societal demands for competent professionals in this field ultimately compelled the Federal Board of the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia to abolish the school in April 1972. In the 1972/1973 school year, it was merged with the Secondary Medical School for Nurses in Health Care in Belgrade, where a special Department for Medical Technicians with Visual Impairments – Masseurs was formed.[44] This decision was intended, on the one hand, to improve the professional level and, on the other, to preserve the physiotherapy profession for "blind" persons. It should be noted that, as indicated by the name of the Department, education was reduced to the occupation of masseur rather than physiotherapist. This was the result of a compromise the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia had to accept to resolve accumulated problems in the operation of the separate school for "blind" physiotherapists. The Commission for Blind Physiotherapists held that physiotherapists could not have only secondary education but required higher education, which influenced the change in the name of the Department and the diploma. At the same time, the Association of the Blind accepted this

42 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Kratka informacija Saveznog odbora SSJ o do sada preduzetim merama otvorenih i aktuelnih pitanja slepih fizioterapeuta, 16. 10. 1970. AJ, SSJ 817, R–19, Zapisnik sa sastanka Komisije koja se bavi pitanjem otvaranja Odseka pri Višoj medicinskoj školi u Beogradu, 14. 7. 1971.

43 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Mišljenje Pokrajinske konferencije Saveza slepih Vojvodine o školovanju slepih fizioterapeuta – Saveznom odboru SSJ, 16. 9. 1970.

44 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Zahtev Saveznog odbora SSJ za ukidanje Medicinske škole za fizioterapijske tehničare i njeno pripajanje jednoj od srednjih medicinskih škola–Izvršnom veću Socijalističke Republike Srbije 14. 8. 1972.

solution on the condition that arrangements be made for the education of "blind" persons at the Higher Medical School, a process that proved quite difficult.[45]

Table 1: Overview of Students and Their Employment Status at the Secondary Medical School for Nurses /Educational and Training Centre for Health Professions, Belgrade, 1973–1986

1973/1986	Studying	Working	Studying	Studying and Working	Retrained	Unknown
Blind	33	17	6	2	1	–
Partially Sighted	161	97	22	20	2	10
Total	194	114	28	22	3	10

Source: AJ, SSJ 817, R-19, Dr Jelena Simeunović, "Obrazovanje fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida," referat izložen na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987, Beograd

This created a problem for approximately 200 students with visual impairments who had graduated from this school by the mid-1980s. The diploma in massage offered them no real prospects for employment. As a profession, it was not even included on the official list of healthcare occupations. The Association of the Blind attempted, in various ways (meetings, letters, appeals, and similar efforts), to persuade the Higher School for Physiotherapists to admit "blind" therapists. However, despite regular applications, the Higher School refused to enrol them. In the mid-1970s, the Association of the Blind even threatened to seek legal enforcement of the right to equal education for "blind" therapists.[46]

Only in 1979, under pressure from medical technicians – masseurs – was secondary education supplemented with an additional training programme, and the Physiotherapy Technician diploma track for persons with visual impairments was introduced.[47] In this way, the profession of physiotherapist was once again recognised under the diploma title. This small victory was largely "symbolic" and therefore insufficient. The struggle for access to education at the Higher School continued throughout the 1980s, as did the fight to improve their professional status.

45 AJ SSJ 817, R–20, Informacija o statusu i problemima slepih fizioterapeuta 28. 2. 1977.

46 Ibid.

47 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Božidar Đokić, Imbro Kovačević, Novak Ražnatović, "35 godina obrazovanja slepih i slabovidih lica za poziv fizioterapeuta u Jugoslaviji," referat na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. u Beogradu.

EDUCATIONAL STAGNATION AND THE DECADE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (1983–1992)

As we have seen, by the 1980s, the education of "blind" persons as physiotherapists had been more frequently contested than recognised, particularly by certain experts, professional institutions, and associations. During the 1980s, proclaimed by the United Nations as the Decade of Disabled Persons (1983–1992),[48] a designation also adopted by Yugoslavia, the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia continued to insist that educational authorities properly resolve the issue of adequate secondary vocational and higher education for persons with visual impairments, including training as physiotherapists.

As a member of the United Nations, the Yugoslav authorities committed to improving the status of persons with disabilities, particularly in education and employment, and to increasing their participation in the country's social life. A special committee was established, annual plans drafted, and numerous activities carried out to promote equality for persons with disabilities and encourage the removal of social and architectural barriers.[49]

The Association of the Blind participated in these activities in line with the opportunities and needs of the people it represented.[50] At the start of the Decade, it observed a trend towards reducing or even abolishing certain long-established benefits for this group. It considered such measures "least opportune" at a time when efforts should have been directed towards creating conditions for the full equality of persons with disabilities in society.[51] This was linked to the broader economic and social crisis affecting Serbia and Yugoslavia in the 1980s.[52] Economic difficulties, compounded by high inflation, disrupted the existing social care system. Disability benefits, for example, were paid late, while discounts and other economic privileges enjoyed by persons with disabilities were restricted.[53] At the same time, initiatives were launched to regulate certain aspects of social protection through legislation and to improve the overall status of persons

48 *United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons 1983–1992 | United Nations Enable*. *History of United Nations and Persons with Disabilities – United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons: 1983–1992 | United Nations Enable*, accessed on 12 February 2026.

49 AJ SSJ 817, R–22, Izveštaj o radu Jugoslovenskog odbora za Dekadu invalida Ujedinjenih nacija 1982–1993. u 1985. godini.

50 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Izveštaj o ostvarivanju programske aktivnosti Saveza slepih Jugoslavije između 14. i 15. sednice Savezne konferencije SSJ (mart 1988–mart 1989), 15. 3. 1989.

51 AJ SSSJ, R–20, Savez slepih Jugoslavije – rad i problemi, bez datuma. Analiza sadržaja pokazuje da je najverovatnije reč o dokumentu koji je nastao krajem 1981. ili početkom 1982.

52 See Slobodan Selenić, *Jugoslavija i Zapad: spoljni dug i unutrašnja kriza* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2024).

53 AJ SSJ 817, R–22, Aktuelna problematika invalidske zaštite u Republici Sloveniji, novembar 1986. AJ, SSJ 817, R–20, Zaštita slepih u kontekstu mera socijalne politike Jugoslavije, 8. 3. 1988.

with disabilities in society. In socialist Serbia, by the mid-1980s, drafting a new law on the training and employment of persons with disabilities had begun, as had a law on spatial planning that would include removing architectural barriers, among other measures.[54]

Regarding the secondary education of "blind" therapists, the Association of the Blind sought to influence changes to certain aspects of schooling to better prepare graduates for physiotherapy. It was considered that the programme was poorly organised within the Secondary Medical School, that is, within the then Educational Centre "Belgrade".[55] This was frequently emphasised at professional meetings of "blind" physiotherapists. For example, at the fourth professional meeting in 1983, considerable dissatisfaction was expressed with the low admission criteria for "blind" students and the reduced curriculum, especially in specialised professional subjects. Such conditions benefited neither the students nor the profession. The profession's growing demands required that candidates for physiotherapy be well qualified and thoroughly trained, a requirement that was not met under the existing educational arrangements. Students lacked basic equipment for practical training in their occupation. Gaps in practical instruction, particularly in the fields of kinesitherapy and physical therapy, reduced the anticipated scope of their professional work. As had been the case a decade earlier, a serious problem for students was the lack of Braille textbooks, which made studying more difficult.[56]

A further issue was that "blind" and partially sighted students were segregated, as they were tied exclusively to their own department. For that reason, participants at the meeting demanded the possibility for "blind" and partially sighted students, as well as students without visual impairments, to attend general education classes together to better prepare them for work and integration into society.[57] This was also in line with contemporary trends in education, which called for the introduction of integrated education as a precondition for social integration.

The situation in secondary education remained largely unchanged throughout the period. "Blind" students were taught less than they were capable of learning. For that reason, well-known "blind" physiotherapists such as Imbro Kovačević concluded that, unlike in Western Europe, where a diploma was a

54 AJ SSJ 817, R–22, Izveštaj o radu Jugoslovenskog odbora za Dekadu invalida Ujedinjenih nacija 1982–1993. u 1985. godini.

55 In socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia, as part of school education reforms, the names of certain institutions were often changed. Thus, the High School of Medicine was transformed in one moment into an educational centre "Belgrade".

56 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Zaključci sa Četvrtog savetovanja slepih fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije, 16.–17. 12. 1983., Banja Koviljača.

57 Ibid.

mark of professional competence, in Serbia and Yugoslavia it had become a mark of insufficient qualification.[58] Another expert, Novak Ražnatović, believed that "blind" physiotherapists "are not indispensable to physical medicine, but they are indispensable to the Association of the Blind". Therefore, the imperative for all relevant actors, especially the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia, was to raise the level of secondary education.[59] What changed in secondary education was the title of the diploma: Physiotherapy Technician–track for the "blind" and partially sighted. This created confusion, since physiotherapists without visual impairments frequently applied for job vacancies, believing that this track trained professionals to work with "blind" and partially sighted persons. Instead, from the 1987/88 school year – when the name of the track was also changed – the diploma of Physiotherapy Technician with Visual Impairment was introduced.[60] This was the fourth change in the status of "blind" physiotherapists. The confusion over diplomas and status, in fact, demonstrated that the concept of secondary education for this profession had not been properly established.

During the Decade of Disabled Persons, as before, higher education for "blind" physiotherapists remained out of reach. Special higher schools for "blind" physiotherapists did not exist, and regular higher schools either refused to enrol "blind" physiotherapists or did so reluctantly and only in exceptional cases. The Higher Medical School in Belgrade continued to reject applicants with visual impairments, despite repeated attempts to enrol. Professional meetings of "blind" physiotherapists and sessions of the Commission for Status Issues of Blind Physiotherapists showed a lack of genuine willingness to raise the level of education for physiotherapists with visual impairments. Conclusions were adopted, and appeals were sent to the competent institutions (educational communities, the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, the Higher Medical School, and others). As emphasised in 1983, the issue of their enrolment at the Higher Medical School had "dragged on indefinitely", with no prospect of moving beyond the position it had remained in for fifteen years.[61] Appeals to the Constitution, education laws, and congress documents – guaranteeing equality in education for "blind" persons, including "blind" therapists – proved ineffective. The Higher Medical School did not wish to amend its Statute, which

58 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Zapisnik sa drugog sastanka Komisije za statusna pitanja "slepih" fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije 16. 4. 1986, Beograd.

59 Ibid.

60 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Dr Jelena Simeunović, "Obrazovanje fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida," referat izložen na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987, Beograd.

61 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Informacija o petom jugoslovenskom savetovanju o društvenom i profesionalnom položaju slepih fizioterapeuta, Titograd, 31. 12. 1986.

contained a provision prohibiting the education of "blind" persons.[62] On several occasions, it was even suggested that "blind" therapists interested in studying at the Higher Medical School for Physiotherapists seek protection of their rights before the Constitutional Court.[63] Despite this, more than twenty individuals with some residual vision completed higher education at existing higher schools in the country. Only one physiotherapist without any residual vision, following a decision of the Constitutional Court, graduated from the Higher Medical School in Belgrade.[64]

Certain data indicate that by 1987, a total of 430 physiotherapists with visual impairments had completed formal education.[65] This is an impressive figure, especially when compared with the renowned London school, from which nearly twice as many physiotherapists without visual impairments had graduated since its founding. At the same time, as previously mentioned, the Serbian and Yugoslav tradition of educating such professionals was relatively short, which further attests to the success achieved, at least in numerical terms.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1990s, among "blind" physiotherapists, it was widely believed that their education remained below the level it should have reached. Even the highly stimulating Decade of Disabled Persons had not been utilised to elevate their education. Various factors contributed to this outcome, including the economic and social crisis, strong prejudices, and opposition – primarily within professional circles and among physicians – which should be highlighted. Of course, there were also opinions supporting their education, but these constituted a minority. All of this resulted in a situation where, unlike, for example, the English school, greater attention was paid to numerical representation than to strengthening admission criteria and improving the quality of training, a point also emphasised by physiotherapists with visual impairments themselves.

62 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Novak Ražnatović, "Slepi fizioterapeuti u sistemu obrazovanja i udruženom radu– položaj i problem," referat podnesen na Četvrtom savetovanju slepih fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije, 16.–17. 12. 1983, Banja Koviljača.

63 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Zaključci Šestog jugoslovenskog savetovanja fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. Beograd.

64 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Novak Ražnatović, "Slepi fizioterapeuti u sistemu obrazovanja i udruženom radu– položaj i problemi," referat podnesen na Četvrtom savetovanju slepih fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije, 16.–17. 12. 1983, Banja Koviljača.

65 AJ SSJ 817, R–17, Božidar Đokić, Imbro Kovačević, Novak Ražnatović, "35 godina obrazovanja slepih i slabovidih lica za poziv fizioterapeuta u Jugoslaviji," referat na Šestom jugoslovenskom savetovanju fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. u Beogradu.

BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS: THE EMPLOYMENT OF PHYSIOTHERAPISTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

As already mentioned, the first generations of physiotherapists found employment in healthcare centres relatively easily, despite traditional prejudices against blind people and unfavourable opinions among many experts and physicians regarding the abilities of therapists with visual impairments. This was connected to the overall shortage of physiotherapists at the time. Consequently, the issue of their employment was not raised, and they did not encounter difficulties in securing jobs. However, in later years, employment opportunities for physiotherapists with visual impairments became increasingly scarce.

According to available data, of the 430 physiotherapists who had completed their education, about 60% were employed nationwide in 1987. This is not entirely clear from the presented statistical overview (Table 2), which records, for example, a total of 283 physiotherapists with visual impairments, of whom slightly more than 89% were employed. Other data indicate that from 1972/73 to 1986, 194 students completed their schooling, yet only about 60% were employed (Table 1). In any case, within our statistical sample, both continuous growth in employment and in unemployment are noticeable at first glance. In the early years (1965–1971), although the number of employed physiotherapists may have doubled, the number of the unemployed increased fourfold. The total number of the unemployed remained relatively stable until the mid-1980s, when it rose sharply.

Among the republics, the largest increase in the number of employed physiotherapists in 1986 was recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. However, their employment figures in 1965 had been significantly lower than those in other republics. In 1986, these two republics also had the highest number of unemployed physiotherapists with visual impairments.

Table 2: Overview of Employed and Unemployed Physiotherapists with Visual Impairments in Yugoslavia and Serbia, 1965–1986

Year		Serbia	Vojvodina	Kosovo	Croatia	Slovenia	Macedonia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Total
1965	Employed	24	*	*	17	10	4	6	7	68
	Unemployed	1	*	*	2	–	–	–	1	4
1971	Employed	32	13	2	23	17	22	14	5	128
	Unemployed	5	–	–	5	2	–	3	2	17
1978	Employed	45	17	5	35	27	26	31	12	198
	Unemployed	2	3	1	–	–	7	4	2	19
1981	Employed	45	17	6	32	29	26	35	15	205
	Unemployed	1	2	–	1	–	7	–	6	17
1986	Employed	60	19	7	46	27	26	52	16	253
	Unemployed	2	2	–	3	–	7	11	5	30

Source: AJ, SSJ 817, R–37, Statistički podaci o "slepima" i članovima Saveza slepih Jugoslavije 1965–1986

In socialist Serbia, without the autonomous provinces, the number of employed physiotherapists in 1986 was two and a half times higher than in 1965 (from 24 to 60). The highest number of unemployed physiotherapists was recorded in 1971, but this later fell to one or two. This aligns with the fact that the employment issue for "blind" physiotherapists first emerged in the late 1960s. During those years, the first generations of higher-educated physiotherapists without visual impairments also began entering the workforce. Secondary vocational education was no longer sufficient to secure a job, as health institutions began requiring physiotherapists with higher education. On the other hand, the Higher Medical School, opened in 1964, did not admit them, which at the time and later contributed to the uncertain employment status of "blind" physiotherapists.[66]

As a result, physiotherapists with visual impairments had two employment options: to work as massage therapists or to wait for the change that would enable them to pursue higher education. Neither option was fully acceptable. For example, most "blind" physiotherapists considered working exclusively in massage therapy inadequate, as their abilities extended far beyond that. The idea that blind physiotherapists could perform only a limited number of procedures in physical medicine was also rejected. They emphasised that there were very few tasks in the

66 AJ SSJ 817, R–20, Informacija o statusu i problemima slepih fizioterapeuta 28. 2. 1977.

field they could not perform.[67] This directly addressed the claim by sighted physiotherapists that those with visual impairments were not versatile specialists. This view was particularly contested by a representative of the Higher Medical School in Ljubljana at a 1969 consultation, who argued that the discussion was irrelevant given the trend in modern education and work towards narrower specialisation. At the same time, "blind" physiotherapists objectively assessed their work situation, acknowledging that they could not perform every task in the same way as sighted physiotherapists.[68]

At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, more than 100 "blind" physiotherapists were working in various health centres across the country. Most of them, although unwilling, worked in medical massage, while a smaller number were employed in electrotherapy and individual patient exercises. "Blind" physiotherapists considered that part of the responsibility lay with their own inactivity, but the main reason was the existing prejudices in the institutions where they worked.[69]

Although a relatively large number were employed, about 25 were waiting for a job. In the 1971 statistical sample, the number of unemployed was lower. At that time in socialist Serbia, five "blind" physiotherapists were not employed. This was a serious problem, as the number of secondary school graduates suggested that unemployment would only grow. Some unemployed physiotherapists waited three or four years to find work, which was a long time for people with visual impairments. It is important to note that health institutions during this period were often unwilling to hire physiotherapists with visual impairments. Some rejected "blind" people outright, while others pointed out that employing them posed organisational and technical challenges that were difficult to resolve.[70] For this reason, some "blind" physiotherapists had to adapt and find work in telephone switchboards, while others changed professions or continued studying fields unrelated to physical therapy.[71]

The most active efforts to resolve employment issues came from the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia. Proposals included requiring any blind physiotherapist who did not secure employment within one year of graduation to undertake practice at the Association's expense to maintain continuity in theoretical and practical knowledge. The Association of the Blind was also asked to assist blind physiotherapists in obtaining adaptive equipment to overcome

67 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Zapisnik sa Prvog savetovanja slepih fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije 24.–25. 10. 1969. u Krapinskim Toplicama.

68 Ibid.

69 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Uvodni referat Branislave Kanački na Prvom savetovanju slepih fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije 24.–25. 10. 1969. u Krapinskim Toplicama.

70 Ibid.

71 AJ SSJ 817, R–20, Informacija o statusu i problemima slepih fizioterapeuta 28. 2. 1977.

work-related difficulties and adapt their workplaces.[72] However, this was unrealistic given the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia's limited material resources.

A major factor in the employment of visually impaired physiotherapists was legislation at the end of the 1970s, which mandated the employment of "blind" people. In Serbia, for example, the 1978 Law on Determining Jobs and Work Assignments for the Mandatory Employment of Blind and Other Disabled Persons regulated the employment of "blind" physiotherapists. Institutions were also obliged to include at least one visually impaired physiotherapist.[73] In practice, however, institutions often refused or simply ignored this requirement. Therefore, the Serbian Association of the Blind emphasised that it was sometimes forced to secure such positions through legal action.[74]

In any case, during the 1980s, similar reasons continued to affect the employment of "blind" physiotherapists. Compared with the rest of the country, the number of unemployed in Serbia in 1986 was small. Nevertheless, employment remained difficult, particularly because the labour market was saturated with physiotherapy specialists.[75]

Numerous other factors also limited employment opportunities for visually impaired physiotherapists in socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia. Notably, strong prejudices and resistance within professional groups, especially among doctors, were particularly pronounced. Sighted physiotherapists, by questioning the competence and abilities of visually impaired physiotherapists, sought to maintain their privileged position. Support from state institutions was limited, as was that from the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia, the group's key advocate. Their employment prospects were further constrained by the insufficient adaptation of educational programmes to contemporary rehabilitation medicine, particularly kinesitherapy and physical medicine. Even legal provisions guaranteeing employment for people with disabilities, especially "blind" individuals, were not always implemented, further narrowing their employment opportunities.

72 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Zapisnik sa Prvog savetovanja slepih fizioterapeuta Jugoslavije 24.–25. 10. 1969. u Krapinskim Toplicama.

73 *Službeni glasnik SRS*, br. 50, 1978.

74 AJ SSJ 817, R–20, Informacija Saveza slepih Srbije o zakonskom regulisanju zapošljavanja slepih u SRS – Savez slepih Jugoslavije, 15. 10. 1980.

75 AJ SSJ 817, R–19, Zaključci Šestog jugoslovenskog savetovanja fizioterapeuta oštećenog vida, 5.–7. 11. 1987. Beograd.

CONCLUSION

The history of visually impaired physiotherapists in socialist Serbia and Yugoslavia illustrates the complex interplay between opportunities and constraints, and between achievement and marginalisation. From the establishment of specialised secondary education programmes in the 1950s to the struggle for recognition at higher levels of education in the 1970s and 1980s, these professionals consistently faced structural, social and institutional barriers. Early generations found it easier to secure employment due to a shortage of physiotherapists, but as the profession developed and competition intensified, visually impaired graduates faced increasing difficulties accessing and advancing into professional positions.

Despite persistent obstacles – including restrictive educational frameworks, a lack of Braille materials, insufficient funding for practical training and widespread prejudice among medical professionals and colleagues – over 400 visually impaired physiotherapists completed their education by the end of the 1980s. Of these, over 90 were from Serbia. While this was a significant achievement, the quality and recognition of their training often lagged behind international standards, limiting both career prospects and professional status. Legislative measures aimed at guaranteeing employment for people with disabilities were often inconsistently implemented, necessitating continued advocacy by organisations such as the Association of the Blind of Yugoslavia.

The struggle of these physiotherapists underscores the crucial importance of systemic support: access to comprehensive education, recognition of professional competence, and the removal of social and institutional barriers. This shows that equal opportunities require more than legal protections – they require integration planning, adaptive resources, and recognition of individuals' abilities rather than their limitations. Ultimately, their story highlights that achieving true professional integration for people with disabilities requires not only legal frameworks but also institutional commitment and societal change.

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