WORK
ABILITY

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"People with changed working abilities: mapping soft skills to find and retain a job place – a resource"

This document is the final report of the work initiated within the first result of the Workability project. It includes resources, information, interviews and research that was conducted by all six partners of the project.

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Introduction

People with Changed Working Ability (PCWA) make up for one billion, that is 15% of the world's population according to the WHO. They experience physical and/or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. In a work environment, PCWAs experience difficulties related to their disability and contrary to common belief, these are not limited to unadapted workplaces. There is a broad diversity of disabled employees and each situation is unique. In fact, as we will see in the following content, most disabilities do not even alter the working capacity of the people living with it.

However, what PCWAs tend to have in common is the non-acquisition of soft skills. This is widely due to the fact they tend to evolve in alternative processes to access the work market, and thus have less opportunity to learn unconscious codes and soft skills. This lack of soft skills plays a huge role in the failed attempts to find a workplace and if so, gives a feeling of maladjustment that makes PCWAs quit sooner than non-PCWAs. Just as technical skills are often difficult to acquire for people with disabilities, soft skills, which are more related to interpersonal skills and behaviour, are leverages for developing the potential of these people. Although they are not measurable or identifiable, they are essential for accessing social and professional networks and places. Difficulties most observed are the following, though this list if far from being exhaustive: acceptance of disability (self-acceptance and from others); oral fluency and self-confidence; mobility; lack of knowledge on professions, process, formations; almost non-existent professional network; illectronism; illiteracy; behaviour, attitudes and conscience of professional codes; personal environment unsupportive etc. On the side of host structures, whether they are « welcoming » or not, barriers observed are the following: ableism; no knowledge on disability (even when awareness-raising policies are implemented, they remain fairly inefficient); misconceptions and misunderstandings; practices and work conditions unadapted to the reality of PCWAs; competing issues between work pace of PCWAs and financial objectives of workplace (productivity) etc.

Also, the identification of soft skills for this public is very interesting because it translates the uniqueness of our personalities and allows us to identify our assets, our irritants, our potential. Soft skills prove to be a good entry point in the reflection of the professional project of people with disabilities.

What are soft skills?

According to the National System of Occupations (NSP, 2011), soft skills can be defined as the following : « *Intangible skills which are hard to measure and are closely connected with individuals' attitudes ». They tend to be infused in the person's behaviour and are non-cognitive, personal and people skills. However it can differ among compagnies. They are called soft in comparison to « hard skills* », which are easily observed and/or measured, easily trained and closely related with individuals' knowledge and are acquired thanks to formal qualification (formation, degrees, professional experience). Soft skills are intertwined and it is perfectly normal.

Our consortium identified 6 useful soft skills that disabled people need to develop in order to find and retain their job place:

- ❖ Sociability and interpersonal interaction (including teamwork)
- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Self-efficacy
- ❖ Motivation to work
- ❖ Affiliation
- ❖ Self-awareness and self-profiling

The aim of the research in partner's countries is to identify best practices in the fields of the project and existing initiatives at local, national and European levels.

Do to so, each partner had a specific soft skill to make researches on and to define after giving a brief framework of the condition of PCWAs in their countries. Based on their research and interviews conducted earlier in the project, partners then had to identify the best practices and formulate recommendations aiming at helping the project's good development.

What results do we expect?

- ❖ Capitalization and inspiration from already proven practices, tools and initiatives existing at local, national and European levels;
- ❖ Identification of needs of PCWAs;
- ❖ Increased capacity to deliver trainings to PCWAs;
- ❖ Increased awareness among public and increased self-awareness among educators, experts, professionals and PCWAS on key soft skills;
- ❖ Newly-updated resources available for all professionals and easily transferable.

I – Framework of People with Changed Working Ability (PCWA) in the European Union

France :

France has **12 million disabled people**. The employment of people with disabilities is governed by the Labor Code, which requires companies to hire PCWAs at a rate of 6% of their workforce. However, the actual rate is currently 1.3% because many companies chose to pay a fine instead of complying with the regulation. The employment rate of PCWAs is also much lower than that of the general population. Only 35% of people with recognized disabilities are employed and the unemployment rate for the overall disabled population is twice the national rate for the general population.

This situation goes against the law of February 11, 2005 for equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of disabled people. When hired, PCWAS most often work in very physical areas, with difficult hours and low skill levels. Most are contracted in manufacturing, cleaning, and other service sector occupations and work in manual fields that are at risk of being destroyed and replaced. They are thus hired "to fill the gaps" (AGEFIPH). Which is regrettable because 80% of disabilities are invisible and have no impact on work and in 85% of cases, hiring does not require any adaptation of the workstation.

Greece

In Greece live and work almost 1.000.000 PCWAs (People with Changed Working Ability) who cover approximately the 10% of the general population. The employment rate for people with severe disabilities is significantly low compared to that for those without disabilities and it is observed that there is not equal employment participation for them.
In the meantime, there has not been a specific national disability strategy or action plan developed in Greece till 2020. The UN CRPD Implementing framework adopted in 2017 (Law 4487/2017) foresees that the assigned Central Focal Point (the General Secretariat of Transparency and Human Rights) is responsible for conducting and submitting a National Disability Action Plan to the Greek Parliament (Art.70). This process is completed in 2020 and the Greek National Disability Action Plan has been presented in the Greek Parliament on the 24th of November 2020 after the completion of the necessary public consultation process.

Hungary

The national survey of the data on the groups of workers with altered working capacity, at the request of the European Union, was carried out in Hungary in 2015 by the Central Statistical Office. Based on the survey summary tables (STADAT), we can make the following conclusions. Demographic characteristics of the 19–64-year-old population with altered and non-altered working capacity by gender:
In the entire population, there are 6,038,497 people with altered and non-altered working capacity; 2,968,047 men and 3,070,450 women. Of these, 5,357,784 people have no altered ability to work; 2,651,851 men and 2,705,933 women. Among the total population, there are **680,713 persons with altered working capacity**; 316,196 men and 364,517 women.

The survey provides additional important data, from which we will now only highlight the factors that limit work. Three types of factors were identified.

The amount of work that can be done; the nature of the work to be performed; going to work. In the group of people with altered work ability, the long-term types of diseases and long-term other sub-capacity problems and problems that limit activity are the following: locomotor problem; cancer, tumor disease; skin disease, allergy causing skin lesions, severe skin lesions; circulatory system disease; chest and respiratory disease; stomach, liver, kidney, or other diseases of the digestive system, or food allergy; diabetes; epilepsy; severe headache; learning problems; nervous system, mental, or mental illness; other progressive disease; other chronic illness.

Portugal

In the face of the pandemic crisis caused by Covid-19, according to the ODDH (2020), following the closure of social support facilities for people with disabilities in March 2020, 40.1% of respondents from reported that they had lost support or services. Regarding education, the solutions provided to students with disabilities during the confinement and deconfinement periods were evaluated negatively.

Regarding the impact of the pandemic on people with disabilities psychological well-being: 51% (n=164) reported feeling sadder or more depressed than usual since the beginning of the pandemic, 58.4% (n=188) responded feeling more anxious than usual, and 39.3% (n=127) reported greater difficulty sleeping.

According to data from the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), the registered unemployment figures show that in 2019, 4.2% (n=12,027) of the individuals registered as unemployed had disabilities. This indicates a decrease of 1% (-108) compared to 2018 (n=12,135). However, it is important to note that the overall reduction in the total number of registered unemployed individuals was much more significant in the general population, with a decrease of 9%. Although the trend until 2019 showed a decrease in the number of registered unemployed individuals (both overall and with disabilities), analyzing the percentage of people with disabilities registered as unemployed reveals an increase in relative terms. In 2016, 2.9% of the registered unemployed individuals had disabilities, while in 2019, it was 4.2%. These data indicate a higher demand for employment services from the IEFP by people with disabilities, but they also suggest a greater difficulty faced by these individuals in accessing the job market.

In terms of legislation In 2001, Portugal established a legal framework to implement the employment quota system for individuals with disabilities who have a functional disability equal to or greater than 60% in all central, regional autonomous, and local administration services and bodies (Law 29/2001 of February 3). Subsequently, in 2004, the country implemented Law 38/2004 of August 18, which focused on the rehabilitation and participation of people with disabilities. This law aimed to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities, encompassing social participation, access to education and employment, access to support services, and the promotion of accessibility conditions. These legal provisions serve as the foundation for all regulations and initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions of individuals with disabilities.
To enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities, various measures have been introduced, including general and specific measures to enhance employability. These measures are regulated by Decree-Law No. 290/2009 of October 12. Additionally, the Employment and Support Program for the Qualification of People with Disabilities was implemented with the financial and technical support of the IEFP (Employment Center in Portugal). These initiatives work towards improving employment opportunities and providing support for individuals with disabilities. Recently, The introduction of Law No. 4/2019 on

January 10th established the employment quota system for individuals with disabilities in the private sector. This law applies to individuals with a disability degree equal to or greater than 60%. According to the law, medium-sized companies with 75 or more employees are required to employ disabled workers, constituting no less than 1% of their workforce. Similarly, large companies must employ workers with disabilities, constituting no less than 2% of their personnel. To ensure a smooth transition, employers are given a period of four to five years.

The legislation places the responsibility on companies to make necessary job adaptations when hiring workers with functional limitations. Employers are required to collaborate with the National Institute for Rehabilitation (INR) and the Employment and Vocational Training Institute (IEFP), which will provide the needed technical support and guidance. However, companies can seek an exemption from this law by submitting a request to the Authority for Working Conditions (ACT) and providing proof issued by the INR, in collaboration with the services of the IEFP, IP, demonstrating the impossibility of effectively implementing the law in their specific workplace or citing a shortage of eligible candidates with disabilities registered in employment services. Failure to report the percentage of 1% to 2% of employees with disabilities in the annual report (single report) for companies and private organisations covered by the law is considered a serious offence. In such cases, financial penalties will be imposed.

Romania

According to Law no. 448/2006, if Romanian employers have more than 50 employees, 4% of them must be people with disabilities. If not, they have to pay monthly to the State an amount representing 50% of the minimum basic salary in the country multiplied by the number of jobs in which no disabled people are employed, or they have to buy products or services from authorized "protected units" equivalent to the amount due to the state budget. Protected units are public or private companies in which at least 30% of employees have a certain level of disability.

In Romania, the percentage of people with disabilities who have a suitable job is only 12%, out of the number of people from this category, this percentage being the lowest in Europe. The data are extracted from a report for the European Union, made by the experts of the Academic Society, with the support of the Motivation Romania Foundation, having data from 2016-2019.

II– Identified Soft Skills

Our consortium identified 6 useful soft skills that people with changed working abilities need to develop in order to find and retain their job place :

Sociability and interpersonal interaction (including teamwork)

Definition of social skills by Eser Yilmaz, M.S., Ph.D.: We, humans, are intrinsically social species. **Effective social interactions** are vital for our careers, personal relationships, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, meaningful social interactions keep our brains healthier and our cognitive skills sharper as we get older (Kensinger & Gutchess, 2017; Ristau, 2011). Given how essential social interactions are, you may find it strange that some individuals can effortlessly handle any social situation whereas others struggle even with the most straightforward social behaviors. These variances in how people carry themselves in social circumstances result from differences in interpersonal skills.

Also known as soft skills or social skills, **interpersonal skills are the competencies that allow you to interact effectively with other people and function well as a member of society.** They enable you to exchange information with others, build connections, maintain relationships, and resolve conflicts.
Within the Workability project, the soft skills chosen by Hand in Hand Foundation are Sociability and Interpersonal activity. Both can be easily identified according to the nomenclature of international diagnostic systems (DSM 5; ICD 11).

The measurement of Sociability and Interpersonal activity is made possible by the WHODAS 2.0 questionnaire issued by the WHO, two versions of which are described (self-filled and filled by others), which consists of 36 items and contains six topics.

The measurement of Sociability and Interpersonal activity from the point of view of personality functioning can be measured with the Personality function scale issued by DSM 5, the two main pillars of which are Self and Interpersonality. Both measure two functions. Self-functions can be measured on a scale of 0-4 for identity and self-directedness. The functioning of interpersonal relationships can be measured on a scale of 0-4 for empathy and intimacy.
According to clients' reports, the most common problem they have when getting a job or keeping a job is that they cannot effectively represent their interests. They are not able to represent their interests effectively, partly due to long-standing diseases and other long-standing partial capacity problems and problems limiting their activities, partly due to the employer's requirements. For example, he has a speech impediment, or finds it difficult to get on public transport, or gets tired quickly, etc. Effective advocacy requires a set of soft skills that help you deal with stressful situations. The application of the assertiveness theoretical model helps to deal with all the problems involved. It is important to highlight that the two extreme modes of communication are common with PCWA clients; aggressive communication and/or submissive communication. In the long term, however, none of them support the process of getting a job or keeping a job. That's why it's important to learn assertive communication.

Leadership

One of the skills taken into account in the Workability project is leadership. A skill that is hard to define, leadership is composed of multiple elements, competencies and knowledge. However, it is instrumental to any group of people, community or social context.

Shamir and Elaim (2005; 30) consider that "leadership is based on *personally held values and convictions* rather than on mere conventions of an appointed office or the desire for personal power, status or other benefits, and that the leader's behaviors are consistent with his or her beliefs, values and convictions.

Another definition, by Avolio and Gardner (2005; 32) concludes that a leader achieves authenticity when he / she is able to own his / her thoughts, has a deep understanding of *self-knowledge and acts in accordance with that knowledge*. Thompson Brady et al. (2009; 41) suggest that "effective leadership enables a person to *promote the wellbeing of others* and motivate followers to do so as well".

What these definitions tell us is that a leader has *strong core values, acts in accordance with these internal values and beliefs* and is not motivated by the power associated with this position, but is motivated by the wellbeing of other people.

Other qualities possessed by good leaders are an *adaptive capacity and resilience* (Bennis, 2007), qualities which most people with disabilities already possess. According to the findings of our own research, but also others (Carter et al., 2010), respondents were of the opinion that *being ambitious, courageous, adaptable, confident, flexible, positive was essential* to make it on the job market, but also in their personal lives.

These qualities, along with *emotional intelligence, the ability to be an active listener and a problem solver* can improve other skills including leadership. Being a leader is a mix of skills that can always be learned and improved and it's important to remember that leadership, as all these other skills, is useful not only in the professional life, but also the personal one, at a community level or other social contexts.

When it comes to increasing leadership by PWCAs in a work setting, some strategies were identified by several studies (Bailey, Powers; 2002) and their *focal point is inclusion and accessibility*. Some of these strategies that can be implemented by companies to be more inclusive, accessible and increase leadership in PWCAs include:

- More training opportunities
- Outreach to include increased number of PWCAs

- Hiring more staff members with disabilities

- Direct involvement of people with disabilities in trainings, planning, policy development
- Collaboration with specialized agencies / groups

What is important for PWCAs is to not be treated differently than others (yes, to have an adapted setting for their specific disability, but not be treated differently), to not feel like a *token employee* (Beckwith et al., 2016) in the workplace, to be seen for their abilities and competencies, not their disability.

For all soft skills to be improved, including leadership, companies need to provide opportunities for each employee (with or without disabilities).

Self Efficacy

In socio-cognitive theory Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as "People's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances". According to the author it can be acquired through 4 sources: present performances (mastery experiences), observation (vicarious experiences/social modeling), forms of persuasion (social Persuasion) and psychological and affective states (psychological responses).

The author argues that self-efficacy relating to the work can influence:
- The performance and learning through goals that employees choose
- The learning and exerted effort
- The persistence in which people attempt new and difficult tasks
- The level of resilience when facing adverse situations
- The amount of stress and anxiety when engaging in a task.

Job self-efficacy is a specific, statelike self-efficacy, defined as employee confidence in their ability to complete their overall job (Tierney&Farmer 2002)
According to Zhu et al. (2019) in their study of the role of job self-efficacy, inclusion and team-learning climate, job self-efficacy is a key mechanism for PWD to achieve success in their job. According to these authors, self-efficacy is of increased importance to PWD employees, given that it influences the choices, tasks and goals that workers adopt and also helps them to thrive and feel included.

Therefore, the literature shows that through various mechanisms (e.g. fostering an inclusive and learning work environment; team-learning climate) the managerial team may influence the levels of job self-efficacy. [1]

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[1] Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 84(2), 191–215.
Tierney, P., & Farmer, S. M. (2002). Creative self-efficacy: Its potential antecedents and relationship to creative performance. Academy of Management Journal, 45(6), 1137–1148.
Zhu, X., Law, K.S., Sun, C.T, Yang, D. (2019) Thriving of employees with disabilities: The roles of job self-efficacy, inclusion, and team-learning climate, Hum Resour Manage.;58:21–34.

Motivation to Work

The **definition of "motivation at work" is the result of a collaborative work of 4 Afeji establishments**, participating in the WorkAbility project: IME Louis Christiaens, MECS de Gravelines, IME Jean Lombard and Site Insertion Métropole.

"*The soft skill "motivation at work" is **the ability to give meaning to one's work**. It is singular and can be measured at the individual level, as an intrinsic value. It can also be measured at the level of the institution in the capacity of the professional to be motivated and motivating. The notion of motivation refers to an evolutionary pathway during the person's journey. Finally, it can be related to the individual's environment*."

Three internal psychological states are necessary for motivation at work:

- the experience of the meaning of work,

- the experience of responsibility for the results of the work

- knowledge of the results.

According to the authors,

- the experience of work meaning is "the degree to which the individual experiences work as generally meaningful, worthwhile and interesting",

- Experience of responsibility for work results is "the degree to which individuals feel personally responsible for the results of the work they do.

- Knowledge of results is defined as "the degree to which the individual knows and understands, on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness of their work" (Quijano and Navarro).

Locke's goal setting theory (1968)

This theory states that **an individual's motivation to work will be greater if objectives are set**. According to Locke and in order to optimize its effectiveness, **an objective must have several aspects**:

- Be clear and precise, specific (this facilitates its achievement)
- Be difficult but realistic (it constitutes a motivating challenge)
- Be accompanied by feedback on its achievement
- Be accompanied by support to achieve it
- Be established with the participation of all employees involved
- Be accompanied by rewards when it is achieved.

For the author, **the difficulty of the objective reinforces the level of effort provided** and its persistence. Furthermore, if the objective is specific, it allows the individual to focus his attention and efforts, which allows him to develop strategies to optimize his work. The individual guided by an objective is thus more efficient than an individual left to his own devices.

Affiliation

The need for people with disabilities to continuously develop their skills, especially soft skills, is felt and understood by all employers. They consider affiliation as one of those important soft skills for PCWAs.

Affiliation is related to an individual's acknowledgement of a group, or their desire for social acceptance.
It can be considered an umbrella term in psychology and sociology that includes other psychological terms like attachment, identification, conformity and commitment. Affiliation is the act of forming a relationship with another person, the state or relation of being closely associated or affiliated with a particular person, group, party, company, etc.

As a soft skill, affiliation is crucial for both personal and team success. It is the most practical way in which a person with disabilities, who often tends to isolate themselves, can overcome barriers, fundamentally contributing to their social integration. It is one of the soft skills that once developed helps in generating others.

There are some studies made on the Romanian labor market, regarding the work motivation of employees, exceeding the financial motivation. They refer to McClelland's model of motivation.
This latter state that motivation to work is determined mainly by one of the following needs (Saal, Knight, 1988): affiliation, power or achievement.

People characterized by the need for affiliation mainly seek relationships of collaboration, friendship, belonging, love, often conforming to the opinions of others.
For these people, close and lasting relationships are motivating, often working in social work and counseling services.
McClelland tried to understand and describe the behavior of people in need of high achievement, their characteristic being that the tasks sought are of medium difficulty, for which they take responsibility, can postpone the moment of gratification, failure does not discourage them, waiting for feedback on performance and tend towards new situations involving moderate risks and innovation (Prodan, 1997).

A certain satisfied need can determine other needs itself, just as the need for affiliation will determine, after belonging to a group, the need to think and react like them, to belong to associations, etc. Thus, we can understand how acquiring the affiliation soft skill for PCWAs can stimulate efficiency in the workplace and effectively increase motivation.

Self-awareness and self profiling

The soft skills are skills that are related to the personality characteristics and according to research by Cinque (2016), they can be divided into three main categories: individual skills, such as self-awareness, creativity, resilience, social skills, such as communication skills, collaboration, conflict management, leadership, methodological skills, such as e.g. adaptability, decision making, critical thinking, analysis and information management. More specifically, Watson (2014) and Coffelt & Smith (2020) recognize self-awareness as one of the most important soft skills.

Self-awareness means knowing and accepting the various aspects of yourself, including strengths and weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motivations, and emotions. Self-awareness is not about discovering deep/ unconscious motivations.

It comes from developing a straightforward and honest understanding of what makes someone separate. People high in self-awareness are remarkably clear in their understanding of what they do well, what motivates and satisfies them (Watson, 2014). It is a skill that can be taught and ultimately for an individual to be fully self-aware, they need to understand their strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, fears, wants, desires, and beliefs.

There are steps to gaining self-awareness:

a) individuals need to know what self-awareness is and understand why it is essential for them to be self-aware,
b) help the individuals identify their talents, strengths, and weaknesses in a variety of different contexts,
c) individuals should reflect on what their feelings, opinions, biases, and values are· they should then think about how these relate to other individuals and their beliefs, and
d) they need to understand what they feel that 'success' is and decide what success is for them.

III – Recommendations from our partnership

Each partner has issued recommendations for the development of soft skills facilitating employment of people with changed working abilities.

Hand in Hand

We at Hand in Hand Foundation have a well-known model for the development of soft skills necessary for employment. In the 1970s, Rathus developed a questionnaire and method to assess assertiveness, which is a skill necessary for effective self-assertion (Rathus, A. A., 1973). A 30-item questionnaire measures how we behave in stressful situations. The Stress Coping Questionnaire later created by Lazarus and Folkman was also based on this model (Folkman, S., Lazarus, R.S. 1980).

The Hand in Hand foundation launched an **assertive training program** during which we conduct situational exercises with clients that help resolve specific conflicts related to their own workplace. Situation exercises are prepared by presenting assertive communication situations described in a communication manual. With role-plays (for example, taking on the role of the employer), we help to change the point of view and understand the other, which develops empathic skills. Education helps to master assertive communication. They work in small groups and help each other with continuous feedback. They report on the results achieved in practice. The practical application of the achieved results can be monitored with follow-up and a control group. The assertive training program operates continuously within the framework of the foundation.
Assertiveness can be accurately measured at the beginning and at the end of the training. We evaluate the difference between the two together with the clients, which means additional help in the process of self-assertion and effective advocacy. They evaluate themselves in the questionnaire, so they receive concrete evidence of how much their assertive communication skills have improved during the program.

MEREK is operated and financed by the General Directorate for Social and Child Protection, which organization is operated by the Ministry of Human Capacitiy's. The goal of the MEREK is to help the social integration of people with physical disabilities through complex rehabilitation services. Currently we offer rehabilitation services to about 200 people with physical and multiple disabilities employing 110 full-time personnel.
The organisational structure of MEREK was developed according to the principle of Complex Rehabilitation. The different branches of Complex Rehabilitation operate in separate professional teams offering rehabilitation services on different fields:
• Personal Care Team: accommodation with or without personal care, medical services; one -to- one personal assistance
• Physiotherapy Team: physiotherapy, sport activities;
• Social Team: social rehabilitation, individual and group services, spare-time activities, temporary social services
• Psychology Team: personal case management, group work, evaluation of skills;
• Occupational Therapy-Group: employment evaluation, probation and permanent workplaces;

• Computer Skills and Pedagogy Group: computer courses, preparation for independent life, communication skills, foreign language, media, basal therapy;

Foundation Moravcsik: The basic activity of the Foundation is to support the activities of the Semmelweis University Psychiatry and Psychotherapy Clinic and the organizations cooperating with it; supporting, organizing and promoting psychiatric and neurological research; supporting education related to the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses; and improving the mental health of society and raising the psychiatric culture of society. The foundation operates a rehabilitation employment workshop, in which work rehabilitation (within the institution) social, developmental and preparatory accredited occupational rehabilitation employment is held.
Accredited employment carries out employment in accordance with its legal regulations and tries to create opportunities to enter the open labor market.
There are several activities carried out in the framework of accredited occupational rehabilitation.

EaSI

The state institution designed to provide help in finding a job is the **National Agency for Employment (ANOFM)**, yet in 2019 it reported helping only 368 people with disabilities. None of the ANOFM offices at county level are ready to receive and help people with all types of disabilities so, in general, the private sector or specialised NGOs are the ones that are trying to create and inclusive environment for PWCAs in all aspects of life.
Some examples of best practices can be found at:

- **Special Olympics Foundation Romania (FSOR)** - One of this foundation's programs teaches PWCAs how to look for a job, how to communicate with potential employers, hot to present themselves at the job interview, how to integrate at their new job, how to relate to colleagues and managers, basically how to improve their *soft skills like (self)advocacy, leadership, communication* by participating in internships. The programme is trying to increase their *social abilities*, develop their *capacity to self-represent* and advocate, to become independent and capable people claiming their rights.
- **Motivation Foundation Romania** – this NGO has the aim to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and provides services that contribute to the development of personal independence and social integration of people with disabilities. Some of its projects include *counselling, preparing participants for the interview process, hiring process mediation* and at the same time it offered support to employers, such as training, recruiting, mediation, counselling during the hiring process.
- **Kaufland ACCES** – The supermarket chain Kaufland developed the Kaufland ACCES program in 2019, dedicated to PWCAs. It is a hiring and integration programme that is inclusive to people with all kinds of disabilities. The program includes special recruiting channels dedicated to PWCAs and internal training programs for integrating the new work colleagues.

Other recommendations for increasing leadership in PWCAs are all about *inclusiveness, accessibility* and *providing opportunities*.

Aproximar

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own ability to accomplish tasks and overcome challenges. It plays a crucial role in the lives of people with disabilities, influencing their motivation, resilience, and overall well-being. By examining various academic and grey literature sources, we can draw several key conclusions regarding the significance of self-efficacy for individuals living with disabilities.

Enhancing Motivation and Goal Achievement:
Studies have consistently demonstrated that self-efficacy positively impacts motivation and goal achievement among people with disabilities (Bandura, 1997; Luszczynska et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2016). When individuals believe in their capabilities, they are more likely to set challenging goals and persist in the face of obstacles. High self-efficacy fosters a sense of empowerment, encouraging individuals to actively pursue their aspirations and engage in activities that lead to personal growth and independence.

Promoting Psychological Well-being and Resilience:
Self-efficacy is closely linked to psychological well-being and resilience among individuals with disabilities (Schwarzer & Warner, 2013). It acts as a protective factor, helping individuals cope with stress, adversity, and discrimination. By believing in their ability to manage challenges effectively, individuals can develop a resilient mindset, adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain a positive outlook on life.

Facilitating Social Participation and Inclusion:
Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in facilitating social participation and inclusion for people with disabilities (Fougeyrollas et al., 1998). When individuals possess a strong sense of self-efficacy, they are more likely to engage in social interactions, pursue educational and vocational opportunities, and advocate for their rights. Higher self-efficacy levels empower individuals to challenge societal barriers, combat stigma, and actively contribute to their communities.

Empowering Self-Advocacy and Decision-Making:
Individuals with disabilities often face decisions that impact their lives, such as choosing assistive technologies, healthcare options, or employment opportunities. Self-efficacy empowers individuals to make informed decisions and engage in self-advocacy effectively (Bandura, 1997). By having confidence in their abilities, individuals can assert their needs, voice their opinions, and actively participate in decision-making processes.
Self-efficacy holds significant importance for individuals with disabilities, shaping their motivation, resilience, social participation, and decision-making. Cultivating self-efficacy is crucial in fostering empowerment and promoting a sense of agency among people with disabilities. Interventions and support systems should focus on enhancing self-efficacy by providing opportunities for skill development, fostering a positive and inclusive environment, and promoting the acquisition of adaptive strategies. By recognizing and harnessing the power of self-efficacy, society can empower individuals with disabilities to lead fulfilling lives and reach their full potential.

In terms of best practices, adaptive Sports and Recreation Programs :

Participation in adaptive sports and recreation programs can significantly promote and develop self-efficacy among individuals with disabilities. These programs provide

opportunities for individuals to engage in various physical activities tailored to their abilities, fostering a sense of accomplishment and confidence. For example, wheelchair basketball teams offer individuals with mobility impairments the chance to learn and excel in a competitive sport, building their self-efficacy through skill development, teamwork, and achievement (Lepore, 2012; Martin et al., 2013). Similarly, adapted swimming programs allow individuals with sensory impairments to enhance their swimming abilities, providing a supportive environment to overcome challenges and reinforcing their belief in their capabilities (Oo, 2018).

Vocational training programs and entrepreneurship initiatives play a vital role in developing self-efficacy among people with disabilities in the professional sphere. These initiatives focus on equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue meaningful employment opportunities or start their own businesses. For instance, a vocational training centre may provide individuals with disabilities with job-specific training, such as computer skills or customer service training, empowering them to demonstrate their abilities and gain confidence in their work-related capabilities (McDonnall et al., 2012; Plotner et al., 2017).

Entrepreneurship programs specifically designed for people with disabilities offer training in business planning, marketing, and financial management, enabling individuals to start and manage their own enterprises (Stapleton et al., 2013; Van Hoven et al., 2019). By fostering independence, self-determination, and success in vocational pursuits, these activities promote self-efficacy and enhance the overall well-being of individuals with disabilities. By engaging in adaptive sports and recreation programs or participating in vocational training and entrepreneurship initiatives, individuals with disabilities can enhance their self-efficacy, leading to increased confidence, motivation, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. These activities provide platforms for individuals to challenge themselves, acquire new skills, and experience success, ultimately empowering them to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential.

Afeji :

Employers' needs: (identified by AFEJI) The different needs in terms of soft skills to be identified are **to accept the right to make mistakes**, **to fail, to know how to adapt and readapt to people with disabilities, to have leadership while knowing how to value the person, to be attentive to their needs and concerns. To be persistent in explaining the repetition of the tasks to be carried out, to have control of one's emotions** so as not to transmit them and put the person in front of one in difficulty.

In general, the educational teams of the AFEJI project partners indicate that motivation to work is generated by a variety of determining factors:

- **fulfillment ; satisfaction; recognition; autonomy; The ability to manage emotions ; A safe work environment with human references.**

Best practices of AFEJI establishments to increase motivation to work:

1. Permitting the **acquisition of professional experience** in an adapted company or in a regular environment (internship in a company)
2. To **suggest volunteer actions** allowing young people with disabilities to benefit from recognition and to invest in society
3. The "**Duo Day" concept** is implemented every year within AFEJI, it is a national and European event that takes place every year allowing a person with a disability to

spend a day in a professional environment, in a company, an association or an administration, in order to observe the work of an employee and to participate in his daily tasks

4. **Workshops for professional integration** that allow people to learn how to write a CV without a diploma. We learn how to highlight the professional and personal experiences and the different soft skills of the people we work with. We also call upon external volunteers to provide support.

5. **Workshops for sharing professional experience**: young people share their experiences, which encourages motivation by seeing that another young person from the same institution is successful.

6. **Emotional management workshops**: to avoid getting discouraged during each emotional change

How these soft-skills are measured:

1. Since the 2002 law, French medico-social establishments have been obliged to draw up a **personalized project** for each person admitted. This project is developed with the various professionals who work with the person. It is also linked to the Serafin nomenclatures, which help to better describe the needs of people with disabilities and the responses provided by medical-social establishments and services. They allow, through a common language for all the actors, to personalize the support in a partnership and modular framework.

2. There are also **integration assessments** that allow for the rapid identification of the person's life skills.

3. **Individual interviews** also allow us to discuss the skills developed during internships or other work experience.

4. **Visits to workplaces** allow the educational teams to confront the realities of the field and to adapt the needs in terms of the young person's skills in the world of work

5. The **internship booklet** (in which experiences, skills, contacts with companies and interviews are listed) can be an asset for the student: he or she can present it to employers during job interviews.

Assoc:

People having a high need for affiliation will automatically fit well into any group setting. They are more adaptive, and they won't try to stand out, be the leader, or be different, but they also need special attemption in order to keep or to help them to increase the feeling of belonging, because specialists say it is a big step in developing other soft skills such as motivation, need of socialization, and others. We will discuss one of the best practices we've found during our research, i.e. the social economy structure of ASSOC: Social Restaurant and Catering

- **Social Restaurant and Catering ASSOC**

The restaurant and catering unit is an ASSOC project created as a social economy structure in 2011. Through this project, indeed, it was founded a social enterprise - more specifically a social restaurant – where currently, among other employees, 8 people with disabilities and 9 people from other vulnerable groups work as cooks, waiters or home delivery riders. ASSOC Restaurant is one of the first social restaurants in the whole Romania and the number of clients served every day is more than 800. The social problem they try to solve through this project is providing vulnerable people - and especially people with mental and physical

disabilities (PwD) - with a job and with professional abilities and competences to be competitive in the labor market. The beneficiaries are 8 people with disabilities, working in the social restaurant and catering by ASSOC. They are between 27 and 50 years old and have different disabilities, such as hearing, speaking and psychomotor disabilities. Getting along with others goes a long way toward the workplace success. Many jobs, but especially working in a restaurant may involve working as a team, listening to one another, and seeing each other's point of view. This requires important social skills such as making eye contact, adopting good manners, and practicing active listening. It also requires professionalism: being prepared, showing up on time and treating others with respect. Since disabled people employed in the restaurant are either responsible for serving, helping at cooking process, or cleaning around, and they are working with people without disabilities, they need continuous development of their soft skills, such as affiliation. The activities that can help them improving their skills are:

     a. Regular meetings with the restaurant manager, specialists (such as 1 social worker or 1 psychologist) the main purpose being discussing about positive experiences in a certain period and solving the possible issues in the workplace.

     b. Developing formal one-to-one mentorship programs and instilling this behavior into the culture of the workplace, so that everyone has a mentorship mindset in helping each other grow. This also implies creating an environment and allowing tools to help people share their expertise with others.

     c. Periodic evaluation and psychological counseling, if needed.

     d. Offering feedback: in order to acquire new skills, people need time to practice. Continuous feedback, while practicing, allows an employee to correct themselves.

     e. Employing specialists or collaborating with specialists such as a social worker or a psychologist is a good practice employers having people with disabilities use.

     f. Team-related activities during the work program and social activities for employees.

     g. Job-related activities outside the workplace, such as the whole team serving for an event in an unfamiliar environment, because it will unite the team, and the beneficiaries will feel a stronger desire for affiliation.

     h. Coaching.

Xenios Polis :

From the research procedure conducted by XENIOS POLIS, it was arisen that various efforts have been made to develop soft skills in Greece.

1) In the framework of the Erasmus+ European program, "DESSA – Development of Skills through Apprenticeships", which was also implemented in Greece, a practice model was created for the development of soft skills to Vocational Education and Training trainees, through the parallel support and guidance of a mentor. DESSA's apprenticeship model is aimed at: VET providers, companies that participate in practical exercises programs, secondary school students, education and vocational training. This education uses the main elements of the apprenticeship model (gamification and physical mentor), as well as the supporting elements and tools (Apprenticeship model for development of soft skills and qualifications). After the end of the apprenticeship, the apprentices receive their final evaluation from the training centers and carry out a final evaluation of their soft skills (DESSA 2019-2021).

2) The postgraduate study program "Critical thinking and soft skills in Biomedical and Social Sciences" that is held at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki aims to cultivate critical thinking and develop soft skills such as empathy, time management and flexibility, problem solving and decision making (Inter-Institutional Postgraduate Program, 2022).

3) The European program "UPENSKILLS: Upgrading Entrepreneurial Skills" in which the University of Patras also participates aimed to upgrade the business skills of young people, including the soft skills. UPENSKILLS identified essential soft skills for entrepreneurship in order to develop a set of training materials for entrepreneurship courses and programmes. These help in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset amongst young people. The project thereby addressed the educational needs of young people, during their progression from high school students to young entrepreneurs (UPENSKILLS 2019-2021).

IV – Focus Groups

All partners, have conducted interviews with educators, experts, and employers in order to get their feedback on the selected soft skills. The main point has been to get a validation of the approaches to be used in the development of soft skills with PCWAs.

Focus groups have been conducted between June and December 2022 with a total of 43 professionals (7 for AFEJI, 7 for Aproximar, 7 for ASSOC, 6 for EASI, 9 for Hand-in-Hand and 7 for Xenios Polis).

4 topics have been discussed during the interviews:

1. Soft skills: how to define and recognise them?
2. Organisational policies/procedures within the organisations: what is done within organisations to foster a better recognition of soft skills? What challenges are faced to do so?
3. Training to soft skills: what is the participant's opinion regarding training on soft skills? Have they already experienced or implemented such a training? And what was the result?
4. Developing computer skills. Use of IT in training programs: what is the participant's opinion regarding the use of IT in training programs?

Find out more about our focus groups in the dedicated report that will be available on our Website

V – Interviews

All partners collected the stories of people with changed working abilities in order to understand their backgrounds, experiences and how important soft skills are in their day-to-day lives.

All vidéos are available on our project Website.

In Hungary, The video was taken with Mr. Gábor Mészáros in 2021, a 48 years old man who has been working for the second year in a shipping company called Gibli Ltd. The company is selling bathroom equipment and Gábor is working there as a cleaner. Mr. Mészáros is living and working in Budapest, Hungary. In the video Gábor speaks about what does soft skills means to him during his daily work life.

In France, **Virginie** is 16 years old. She is in the IME Jean Lombard. During the day, her personalised project includes a professional hygiene and cleanliness workshop. Virginie has an intellectual disability and attention problems. Nevertheless, she has many soft skills that enable her to compensate for her difficulties and to integrate easily into the mainstream environment. That is why we wanted her to give her testimony.

In Romania **Delia** holds the position of talent acquisition manager at Kaufland Romania. She enjoys her job because she likes working with people and also because this kind of work helps her grow as a person and as a professional. For Delia, soft skills are the skills that help you in life, both personal and professional, abilities like creativity, open-mindedness, emotional intelligence or flexibility / adaptability. She's all about attitude and courage and believes that anything you set your mind on can be achieved.

Gyorgy is 32 years old and she has hearing and speech impairment. She has been working in the ASSOC restaurant for 10 years. When she got hired she didn't really know how to do many things, but she says she can handle everything. Beyond the physical skills she acquired, Gyorgy is proud to have learnt to listen and to socialize without being ashamed. At work she feels encouraged every day, and that she is part of a family.

Florin is 30 years old and for now he is working at a city market. For him, soft skills are personal skills, which may help in professional development too. For example, affiliation helped him to feel more motivated to come to work, to be more efficient, and also to increase his productivity in daily activities.

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