



Erasmus+



WorkAbility

« PEOPLE WITH CHANGED WORKING ABILITY (PCWA): MAPPING THE WAY TO GET SOFT SKILLS TO FIND AND RETAIN A JOB PLACE – A RESOURCE » (PR1)

Focus Group Reporting (A3)

Project Number: 2021-1-FR01-KA220-ADU-000026

Participants

<p>Focus Groups Location</p>	<p>For Afefi (FR): IME Jean Lombard 95 rue Lutun 59116 HOUPLINES IME Louis Christiaens route de Beaubourg 59820 GRAVELINES Development Department - General Management - 199/201 rue Colbert 59000 LILLE</p> <p>For Aproximar (PT): Online, Teams- Portugal</p> <p>For ASSOC (RO): Baia Mare</p> <p>For EASI (RO): Online, Zoom- Romania</p> <p>For Hand in Hand Foundation (HU): Budapest</p> <p>For XENIOS POLIS (GR): Online, Google Meetortugal</p>
<p>Date:</p>	<p>For Afefi (FR): Exchanges in several stages between June and December 2022</p> <p>For Aproximar (PT): 28/09/2022</p> <p>For ASSOC (RO): 06/09/2022</p> <p>For EASI (RO): 03/08/2022</p> <p>For Hand in Hand Foundation (HU): 11/07/2022</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;">For XENIOS POLIS (GR): 03/08/2022</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Facilitator's of/and observer name:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">For Afefi (FR): Cyndi SEVILLANO SANCHEZ Myriam BOUILLAUD ALOEGNINOU Aurélie DELLYS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For Aproximar (PT): Patricia Aquino (Facilitator) João Correia (Observer)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For ASSOC (RO): Fancsali Fiameta-Alexandra-Petronela (Facilitator) Mureşan Terezia-Rita (Observer)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For EASI (RO): Ana-Maria Despoiu (Facilitator) Elena Balan (Observer)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For Hand in Hand Foundation (HU): Ákos Pordán (Facilitator) Ákos Pordán (Observer)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For XENIOS POLIS (GR): Vassilis Bokolas (Facilitator) Katerina Charokopou (Observer)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Number of participants:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">For Afefi (FR): 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For Aproximar (PT): 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For ASSOC (RO): 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For EASI (RO): 6</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For Hand in Hand Foundation (HU): 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For XENIOS POLIS (GR): 7</p>

Focus Group Profile:

For Afefi (FR):

Technical Educators - Male - 1
Specialized Educators - Male - 2 / Woman - 2
Job Developer - Female - 1
Head of Department (previously QWL Project
Manager) - Female - 1

For Aproximar (PT):

Gender: 4 male, 3 females
1 participant: Human Resources
1 participant: People with disabilities with
higher education
2 participants: People with disabilities with
work experience
1 participant: Coach
1 participant: representative of OED –
Operação de Emprego para Pessoas com
Deficiência (Employment Operation for
Persons with Disabilities)
1 participant: Social assistant

For ASSOC (RO):

(summarise age range, gender, background)
Gender: 1 male, 6 females
Age group: 23-50
2 participants: representative of 2 employers
2 participants: vocational counselors and social
workers
2 participants: psychologists
1 participant: representative of Social Work
University of Baia Mare

For EASI (RO):

37-50 years old (average 46)
2 men & 4 women.
Almost all participants represented
organizations from Bucharest, from both public
and private sector. Their roles were NGO vice-
president (and persons with a disability),
general secretary, community manager,
psychologist, senior advisor

For Hand in Hand Foundation (HU):

(summarise age range, gender, background)
gender: 2 male, 7 female
age group: 26 - 52
2 participants: employees with disability
5 participants: member of service provider
1 participant: representative of an employer

	<p>1 participant: representative of a special school, training specialist</p> <p>For XENIOS POLIS (GR):</p> <p>1 participant: employee with disability in public education sector</p> <p>1 participants: director of Directorate of Primary Education (West Thessaloniki)</p> <p>1 participant: deputy Director of private school of primary education</p> <p>1 participant: nurse, representative of Greek public health sector</p> <p>1 participant: representative of an NGO</p> <p>1 participant: representative of private educational institutions (secondary education)</p> <p>1 participant: nurse, representative of Greek special education schools</p>
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Topic:	Key points	Examples (a key quote from the discussion)
Topic #1: Soft skills		

<p><i>AFEJI</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attitudes related to the soft skill "motivation at work": <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The posture - The representation - The objectives set, the perspectives, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The direct/indirect gain, - The added value, the valorization, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The lighting, - The feeling of usefulness, - Recognition by professionals, by the family, by peers, the feeling of belonging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The common core, the base, - Shared values - Socialization, interaction with others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Put yourself in a work situation, - To be in the norm, to "do" as the others, - Inclusion, living together, being a citizen, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal satisfaction, success, - The questioning, - Evolve in a secure environment, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust in others. 	<p><i>Definition from an AFEJI inter-institutional focus group:</i></p> <p><i>The soft skill "motivation to work" is the ability to make sense of 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 path during the person's journey.</i></p>
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	<p>- In AFEJI's establishments, we use the Soft skills self-assessment: an assessment with the educators (technical and specialized) to evaluate the newly acquired and/or reinforced/to be improved soft skills with objectives set according to the young person's projects after each work situation.</p>	<p><i>Finally, it can relate to the individual's environment. Within the institutions Soft skills self-assessment: assessment with the educators (tech and specialized) to evaluate the newly acquired and/or reinforced/to be improved soft skills with objectives set according to the young person's projects</i></p> <p>"As a child, we suggest it to them, as an adult, they have to take it on and be willing to do it.</p> <p>"Devaluation of work value, de-motivation observed"</p> <p>"Include the family in the youth's project, let them become involved in it, and remove any apprehensions.</p> <p>"Personal Protective Equipment: concrete equipment that anchors the young person in the situation, helps to prepare for the internship, in a "more serious" professional situation, with "a status", consideration and recognition"</p>
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		<p>"The most important thing is autonomy" "Sport: acquisition of codes in a tacit and gentle way, learning of the rule and of frustration".</p>
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<p>APROXIMAR</p>	<p>Soft skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should be called fundamental skills, since soft skills are essential to the worker both in professional and personal capabilities - Soft skills define character and competences. - Soft skills are behavioral, emotional skills that some are acquired, others are intrinsic to the person, and the majority it is possible to develop. <p>Importance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-knowledge is very important for the development of soft skills. - In a selection process, soft skills should be seen before appearance and hard skills. - Soft skills create empathy and allow us to understand what is going on with another person. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The development of soft skills is the kick-start to employability. - The person with disabilities themselves can foster and boost the development of soft skills for other workers in the workplace. - It is essential to work with self-knowledge. 	<p>Examples:</p> <p>"Soft skills are what builds us as beings, it is the essence of each one."</p> <p>"Being an organized, empathetic, collaborative person, among others, is also learned"</p> <p>"They don't teach you to be resilient, persistent, positive and confident."</p> <p>"We try to teach them to know how to listen to a negative response so that demotivation does not take care of them, and they manage to be positive. " (in relation to training disabled people and helping them find jobs)</p> <p>"There is a very negative message regarding soft skills when it comes to people with disabilities."</p>
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	<p style="text-align: center;">Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Soft skills are also learned, however most people with disabilities are not taught and trained to do so (Example: being an empathetic, communicative person, etc. can also be learned).- Employers place a high value on hard skills in recent years<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Organizational mindset change, companies are very focused on results (money) and lack the understanding that people are the ones who move the business. And when we talk specifically about soft skills, how important it is to work on the plurality and the differential of each one, to leverage the strengths of each human being.- It is necessary a change in mentality so companies realize the importance of soft skills.	
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<p>EASI</p>	<p>Soft skills (“<i>competențe transversale</i>”) are understood as skills that are not specific to a certain domain or job and that are related to critical and analytical thinking, decision-making, entrepreneurship, social and personal traits, flexibility in thinking – they are skills that make an employee more valuable at the workplace.</p> <p>Hard skills (“<i>competențe profesionale</i>”) are understood as the skills related to a certain job or profession and that are necessary to perform the job.</p> <p>Participants talked about a general mismatch between the required skills and the skills the candidates have and explained this difference through a reconfiguration happening on the job market. Soft skills are particularly perceived as (difficult to find, challenging in finding).</p> <p>PCWA are perceived as isolated in the Romanian society (not integrated, not visible), which is associated with a deficit of emotional and social skills, such as lack of affiliation skills, trouble integrating in the team, lack of collaboration and negotiation skills, etc.</p>	<p><i>"Soft skills can refer to a capacity for both learning and teaching. I consider that the term soft skills refers more precisely to general skills and not to job-specific skills" (F, 37 y.o., Bucharest, public sector).</i></p> <p><i>"It's the requirements of the job vs. the ability to implement them" (F, 49 y.o., Bucharest, public sector)</i></p> <p><i>"Normality - the disabled person can develop these soft skills through their own experience of integration in the workplace. Disability compensates - they are very competent in what they know, they reach peak performance. I personally learned here how to solve problems differently. Problem solving in the workplace, the most important skill to have." (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p>
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However, following their experience with PCWAs, participants agreed on the fact that PCWA usually have good or very good problem-solving and critical thinking skills (out of the box), being able to think about alternative solutions.

„They have an out of the box thinking. Everyone is trying to get to creative thinking. PCWA have this out of the box thinking.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)

“Retention rate of those who have committed is very high, they have successfully integrated.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)

<p>ASSOC</p>	<p>Soft skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - personal skills - they are manifested individually, and have a close connection with the person - not all people can develop the same soft skills: some people, for example, have a strong inclination towards teamwork, while others are very skilled in organising themselves. - they seem not to be skills learnt in school or in college, but more skills brought from home, and developed with the passing of time. - other examples of soft skills from participants in the focus group are: ambition, self-esteem, proactivity, perseverance, self-efficacy, affiliation, involvement, responsibility. <p>Hard skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - technical skills - hard skills are the technical skills you need to complete specific tasks. - hard skills are acquired through formal education and training programs, while soft skills are personality traits that impact interpersonal interactions. 	<p>„This concept is well known to me. It's easy for me to identify soft skills that would be essential in terms of the occupational approach of the disabled people I hired, without knowing that they are called soft skills and that it is a concept used. Skills that would fall into this category I believe are: teamwork, communication skills, leadership, emotional intelligence, motivation.”</p> <p>„I've never heard of this term, but referring to what it means, I could consider myself bumping into these soft skills and what they represent all around me.”</p> <p>„To my surprise I realised that, in college, these soft skills are often emphasised, but without being called soft skills. Rather, they teach us about them, about their importance, about how they can contribute to the good integration of vulnerable people in society. It's an opportunity to fit these skills into a concept.”</p>
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	<p style="text-align: center;">Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hard skills can be measured or evaluated while soft skills are hard to assess - soft skills are not tested during the hiring process - employees develop hard skills through education and on-the-job practice, while they develop soft skills through various, life-long professional and personal experiences - soft skills are personal skills, hard skills are technical skills <p>Challenges related to soft skills in organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not having many information about how to enhance/exploit/evaluate them - the employer often seems more focused on the development of technical skills in order for PCWAs to do the tasks correctly, than on developing soft skills - in some organisations the development of soft skills happens at the same time as the technical ones, however, there is no procedure that uses the „soft skills” concept alone (i.e., without being accompanied to hard skills) <p style="text-align: center;">-</p>	<p>„I consider hard skills to be technical skills, related to the person's job. For example, in our case, we teach new employees to package the product, once finished. Thus, they acquire packaging skills. The truth is that the first thing we focus our attention on when we have new employees is to teach them how to do their job correctly from a technical point of view. Bearing in mind that we are also working with people with mental retardation, the instructions must be clear, simple and often checked. While it's easy to assess the level at which a person is working in terms of physical skills, I don't know how to do that with soft-skills yet, or if it is possible.”</p> <p>„ I think that employers focus more on hard skills and too little on soft skills, especially when hiring. For example, I would like to have a set of tests that assess the potential of the person I am going to hire to develop teamwork skills, empathy, the desire to progress, or any others.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">„Both hard skills and soft skills are important for success in the workplace. All jobs need a mix of hard and soft skills.”</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- when we talk about employed people with disabilities, the emphasis is placed on supporting them, more than on their personal training and development, but PwDs need more than support: they are also able to develop themselves.- instability in the workplace makes it difficult to effectively implement a soft skills development procedure. <p>What can be done in order to address soft skills at individual, organisational or community level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- public information- online information campaigns- highlighting the benefits of developing soft skills in our own organisation	<p>„Another challenge in our company and probably in many other big companies is job turnover. Often PwDs get hired and then leave, hoping for more facilities elsewhere, and return after a short time, having to start the process of learning work techniques from scratch, probably in other departments. There is less time to evaluate and to try to develop their soft skills.”</p>
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<p>HAND IN HAND</p>	<p>Soft skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how to get along with another person, accept them and accept myself - it is somewhat a gift, but it can be improved, although more difficult <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the science of human relations - Above ability, key competences: communication skills, creativity, conflict management, all the skills needed to relate to another person <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new competences are learning, flexibility, adaptability to change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I've never heard of this. - Human factor. This includes how I make connections, my self-awareness, my perception of life and work. The demands I place on my work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than just interpersonal relationships. I don't know how much self-awareness counts as a competence. <p>Flexibility, cooperation skills, social competences in general</p>	<p>"I've never heard that term, but I have heard the term human factor. I've been working for many years because learning was difficult for me. When I work with people with disabilities, I find it much harder to understand myself... where there are healthy people, I find that they are much more accepting and inclusive. At work I am treated like family. ... I have experienced many times that people don't accept that I am different. Here, I have experienced that they don't look at how I walk or twitch my hands, here they get to know me and treat me like a healthy, normal person."</p> <p>"Where I work now, the relationship works very well, it's all about who's who."</p> <p>"You can get feedback that you're doing your job well and the boss says all this so that you can learn from it. It's also a very good learning experience."</p> <p>"There was a Swiss method developed for soft skill development, I learned it at university in 2002 and I can still use it now. There have been changes, but the same things still need to be developed: listening to each other, conflict management and communication. Children are not learning this, we are still at the same place where we were 20 years ago."</p>
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	<p style="text-align: center;">Differences:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Hard skill: qualification, learnable, measurable, obtainable. Soft skill: partly aptitude, partly developable.</p> <p>In physical jobs, there is little emphasis on soft skills, it is more about what the employee can do and what they can do physically. In a qualified graduate job, it is more common to look at soft skills.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">It is not tested during the selection process, but when the employee is hired, there is a perception that they are expected to have soft skills.</p> <p>Challenges: assessing and knowing these skills is also difficult. It is also difficult to measure with tests, but a one-to-one job preparation programme is a very good way to identify what an employee needs to improve.</p> <p>The experience of the first 20 years, the patterns that come from family and the experiences of schooling are fundamental. School focuses almost exclusively on hard skills, and parents tend to judge their children on this basis (what will they be able to do?)</p> <p>It's important what kind of feedback you've received, how you've been taught to manage and regulate your emotions, whether you've been allowed to ask for help, whether you've received help, etc. All of this is behind all the soft skills.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The central question is whether we recognise that these skills are important and talk about them.</p>	<p>"We have to do development continuously, in practice, and now, for example, young people are practising how to talk to colleagues and how to treat each other."</p> <p>"These skills are also brought from home: in addition to education, it is also important how conflicts are handled at home, how much the person has been encouraged to do things for themselves, how much they have been able to increase their self-efficacy. These are deeply ingrained patterns. This is where self-awareness and self-reflection become important. Whether I, as an employee, want to develop as an individual is also a matter of choice."</p> <p>"Some people always have a problem when someone suggests that their work is not perfect - disappointment, guilt. For a person with autism, there's only so much eye contact you can make. Or some people are blocked by a simple question because they feel in an exam situation. If you don't resolve his confusion, he can't go any further. I worry about what happens to young people when they go to a place where nobody cares."</p>
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<i>XENIOS POLIS</i>	<p>The first participant pointed out that soft skills in schools are formed on the basis of smooth coexistence through, for example, an efficient way of communication, which affects the human management (here the human management is addressed to the meaning of adaptability, which is carried out through interventions of a consultative nature. The second added that soft skills are addressed to the human behavior. As regards the field of disability, it is mentioned that an adequate human management and a respectful relationship between colleagues is important. Nevertheless, less empathy and an inefficient time management are often observed in the work places. A connection between the gender and the soft skills were pointed out the third participant, who, specifically, mentioned that, mainly, the women are not familiar with the need of soft skills either due to lack of knowledge or due to the pressure they face from the family environment in order to follow a specific profession. Additionally is mentioned that European projects are developed on a multicultural basis, in which soft skills are necessary and women are appeared more attuned to soft skills. Finally, the European projects respect the gender dimension.</p>	
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The **fourth participant** mentioned that soft skills are referred, mainly, to communication and social skills; i.e. self-awareness. Especially, as regards the school environment, it is observed that there is cooperation between teachers on the basis of good behavior as regards the relationship between teachers and students and teachers with their colleagues. The **fifth participant** mentioned that a teacher or/and a professor must have honesty and authenticity for effective collaboration with students. The **sixth** states that soft skills are based on the habits and characteristics acquired through the workplace. A nurse should have confidentiality, trust, empathy, organizational skills, and time management while she should work taking into consideration of improving communication. The **last participant** pointed out that a nurse, who works with children with any type of disability, as well as the hospital staff must possess patience, kindness, empathy and acceptance that will bring about the integration of these groups into society.

Topic:	Key points	Examples (a key quote from the discussion)
Topic #2: Organizational Policies/Procedures within the organizations		

<p>AFEJI</p>	<p>department, managers have completed this guide with questions that question the soft skills, directly or indirectly.</p> <p>Each employee within the AFEJI association is received once a year by his or her manager in order to discuss the past year. This meeting is carried out using a guide that enables the evaluation of know-how and interpersonal skills. At the same time, AFEJI has worked on a practical guide for employees and managers to prepare for this EAD, which enables the employee to annotate and evaluate his or her softskills in order to enhance them and/or work on them. During this good practice, non-technical skills are taken into account in the same way as technical skills.</p> <p>k) through individual and group interviews to propose spaces for dialogue and exchanges in a work group on the different points of view that make up the work environment in order to identify resources and work better together.</p>	<p>"Two-way inclusion; bringing people from the mainstream into the EMI"</p> <p>"Fighting the rejection of the other"</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The AFEJI association also participates in Duo DAY (national initiative since 2017). During one day, new duos are formed composed of a professional and a person with disabilities to exchange around a profession, missions and a work environment.- AFEJI also has a Quality of Life at Work department with a referent per establishment. In 2022, the people in charge of this service set up a project called METEOR for professionals returning from a long period of sick leave and/or senior citizens. It is an approach based on scientific methods: metacognition (regaining power over one's own cognitive functioning, increasing one's autonomy, self-esteem, and ability to bounce bac	
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<p>APROXIMAR</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some companies thinking about working on diversity do not use affirmative vacancies/portfolios (job offers whose give preference to historically disadvantaged groups in society) exclusive to people with disabilities. - Whether it's training or soft skill policy, companies still have a lot to do in relation to people with disabilities, they don't think about the development of that person (they don't think about the career progression). - Participants are unaware of companies that carry out training for people with disabilities in particular, but companies do the events and training for soft skills to all workers (which may involve PwD if the company has workers with disabilities) - Provide opportunities and space to create practices so that people feel at the centre of their dynamic and share their experiences when developing policies and training for soft skills development. 	<p><i>“Companies are obliged to train employees, most companies are only concerned with training hard skills, there is no methodology to develop soft skills, within the training that is mandatory for companies.”</i></p> <p><i>“Affirmative vacancies are actions that help, but I see that few companies actually internalize this in order to add value to the people involved. They help.. but they are meeting the schedule.”</i></p> <p><i>“The best possible practice to be adopted is to give space for the individual to shine, so that they can make their contribution, so that they can talk about who they are, what drives them, purpose, mission, vision. When we give space, we manage to create practices in which each one feels at the center of the dynamics and can share freely. Give the participants the space to expose themselves, to make their unique contribution with the aim of making soft skills training more human. True transformation always comes from within.”</i></p>
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	<p style="text-align: center;">Challenges:</p> <p>Whether it's training, or policies, companies still have a lot to do, when it comes to the disabled worker. No thought is given to that person's development, to their career.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Participants do not see Human Resources and management involvement.</p>	<p><i>"I know some companies, not many that do soft skills training."</i></p> <p><i>"We need to help them to be developed, and soft skills for me is not giving anything to anyone, it is a regulation of a potential that is already within the person, and they need to believe and work, .. for me this would be a good practice to be designed"</i></p> <p><i>"OED works on these issues."</i></p> <p><i>"There are also some companies that work on these issues: for example, El Corte Inglés does a playful action that emphasizes the value of empathy and diversity. It's not automatic, but people are talking and thinking about it."</i></p> <p><i>"Oeste Prisma also has all the years of teamwork and mutual help – that day they hire a sign language interpreter to carry out actions."</i></p>
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<p>ASSOC</p>	<p>There are companies which have no policies for developing soft skills, although they were somehow dealing with this aspect - without realising it - but not on the basis of a specific procedure.</p> <p>In ASSOC's restaurant, a software is employed to make the procedures more efficient. This can be a good example of paying attention to the employees' soft skills: it helps to develop personal teamwork skills, efficiency, and also- being an intuitive program that provides feedback - gives employees the confidence that they can handle it at work.</p> <p>A policy is needed not only at organisational level in order to develop soft skills for PwDs, but also procedures are needed in order to develop leaders within the organisation, who are able to deal with this aspect.</p> <p>There are companies which have no policies for developing soft skills, although they were somehow dealing with this aspect - without realising it - but not on the basis of a specific procedure.</p>	<p>„There is no soft skills development policy in our company.”</p> <p>„Throughout my experience as a vocational counsellor, I haven't really met employers to ask me about the soft skills of the disabled person they want to hire. However, I was always asked about how the person is temperamentally, how quickly they give up/get discouraged, how they work in a team, aspects that employers would probably follow throughout the occupational process.”</p> <p>„We deal equally with all the employees we have in the restaurant. Disabled people notice quickly if they are treated differently and they don't like it. However, we try to pay special attention to the exceptional situations that may arise and that may disrupt the work rhythm of people with disabilities, thus trying to create a pleasant environment, in which they feel that they are part of a team.”</p>
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	<p>In ASSOC's restaurant, a software is employed to make the procedures more efficient. This can be a good example of paying attention to the employees' soft skills: it helps to develop personal teamwork skills, efficiency, and also- being an intuitive program that provides feedback - gives employees the confidence that they can handle it at work.</p> <p>A policy is needed not only at organisational level in order to develop soft skills for PwDs, but also procedures are needed in order to develop leaders within the organisation, who are able to deal with this aspect</p> <p>When companies talk about social responsibility and about the fact that they try to create a company culture, they outline an educational culture also in the sense that people with the same values come into the organisation and assimilate the values that they promote in the organisation. Therefore affiliation is promoted as a soft skill in many companies.</p> <p>What an ideal program should include: assessment (if possible) of soft skills right from the beginning of the employment; some employers would like to know, during the hiring process, if candidates</p>	<p>„For us, as social workers or vocational counsellors, it is difficult to make employers pay attention to this. They should realise how much this helps in employee retention and in the company development. this issue should be highlighted and discussed more.”</p>
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	<p>possess some skills such as: stress resistance, self-confidence,</p>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- teamwork abilities, IQ, tendencies towards personality disorders- a procedure for developing existing skills that match the job <p>periodic evaluation of the staff. This should be done from the point of view of the development of soft skills, and an evaluation of the employees' opinion would be useful as well (i.e., if they like the program, if they feel that it helps them).</p>	
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<p>EASI</p>	<p>The issues PCWA are facing at a workplace are considered a shared responsibility, as companies/employees are believed to be accountable for how they help integrate the PCWA – often, they are considered disinformed and confused as to what to do, how to behave – so, there is a perceived lack of soft skills on behalf of the companies and employers as well.</p> <p>Participants feel that the individual and practical needs of the PCWA are also not clear, which is why there is a need for more frequent and interpersonal communication between the PCWAs and their employers and colleagues.</p> <p>A situation has been discussed, considering the difficulty of PCWAs to receive the disability pension from the state, if their contract ends and cannot find another job.</p> <p>Participants believe that companies are not stimulated enough to hire PCWAs, as they prefer to pay a fine instead of hiring PCWAs, not being aware of the advantages of integrating them</p>	<p><i>“ Within 24 hours he had a support bar installed. Some things can be solved with minimal intervention. With something so trivial. The child who doesn't cry doesn't get food.” (M, 50 y.o., Teleorman, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>“ Financial assistance is not enough. Integration is needed, not assistance. It's all about mentality. To be seen as a normal person.” (M, 50 y.o., Teleorman, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>“ Directives are recommendations. For now. From next year it is compulsory in Romania.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>“ Financial and personal security is needed first and foremost - I refer to the motivational pyramid. Once basic needs are met, each person feels the need for security, and if this need is met, the person will want more - the need to contribute, to develop. If one could articulate the part of legislation that provides financial security...” (F, 49 y.o., Bucharest, public sector)</i></p>
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	<p>A collaboration between the public (state) and private sector has been mentioned as necessary – information campaigns are considered insufficient, as well as the state legislation, which is not fully enforced, even if it's available. There is hope surrounding the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 – 2030¹ , even though participants expect it to not be fully implemented, following their previous experience with the implementation of projects and legislation targeting PCWAs.</p> <p>Participants are rather disappointed with the legislation not being implemented properly, or with the research that has been done, with no valuable follow-up in terms of impact, benefits or improvements.</p>	
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¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_813

HAND IN HAND

"Some people always have a problem when someone suggests that their work is not perfect - disappointment, guilt. For a person with autism, there's only so much eye contact you can make. Or some people are blocked by a simple question because they feel in an exam situation. If you don't resolve his confusion, he can't go any further. I worry about what happens to young people when they go to a place where nobody cares."

"Employees often report that workers with a disability get a lot more attention, more personal contact. That's what the average worker wants."

"I used to tell managers about the Mayo experiment, which concluded that performance does not increase with a nicer or better working environment, but with more care." (Elton Mayo, Australian psychologist, Hawthorne Experiments 1927-32)

XENIOS POLIS

The **first participant** highlighted that the school, in which he works disposes of a psycho-pedagogical department which organizes training seminars at the beginning of the school year that emphasize the effective relationship between teachers and children. The **second**, who also works in school, participated in European Erasmus projects, that the school participated as a partner, and in seminars that addressed the empathy, obtained through the theater. The HR department of the organization that the third participant works for, identify the soft skills of each candidate employee from the stage of the interview, before the recruitment. The **fourth participant** participates in training seminars separately and not organized by the hospital she works, while the fifth highlighted the training seminars that organize the educational directory. The **last participants** point out that in public schools any training seminars are chosen by personal initiatives.

Topic:	Key points	Examples (a key quote from the discussion)
Topic #3: Training to soft skills		

AFEJI	<p>-The informal leaders are the human resources managers. The HR policy within AFEJI and its operational deployment encourages reflection on softskills. Indeed, since 2021, managers must follow a training course in addition to their initial training (state studies). The sessions contain several modules related to soft skills such as emotional intelligence, how to optimize recruitment, and how to reconcile job retention and incapacity.</p> <p>-This is currently not quantifiable, but softskills are mentioned on job descriptions and therefore linked to employee compensation</p>	<p>"When recruiting, the leitmotif is to favor soft skills, because technical skills are acquired faster than soft skills."</p>
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<p>APROXIMAR</p>	<p>Not specifically for people with disabilities, but there are companies that have soft skills development for employees in general, and that includes people with disabilities. Like teamwork, time management, leadership...</p> <p>Challenges:</p> <p>Companies still do not think about training hard skills or soft skills for people with disabilities.</p> <p>The participants with work experience mentioned that there is a HR department, but there was nothing specific about soft skills, only training in general.</p> <p>There are companies, which have some autonomy in creating initiatives.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Once a month, a worker can be responsible for doing some activity for the team: agriculture, cooking, communication training, anything. In that, it enhances soft skills. Because this also reveals the skills of others. In these gatherings they generate an interaction to also share opinions, visions and values, a different dynamic than usual.</p> <p>There are few, you need to look very well to find companies that care, that have this type of activity.</p>	<p><i>“Be more person-centered and not a typical old-school teacher-student model. Because developing soft skills takes experimentation, exercise, practice, and requires an application for everyone.</i></p> <p><i>Promotion and awareness are essential, even for a paradigm shift in which soft skills development becomes something more natural, more encouraged and more publicized, let's say even at the school level, before the arrival of the job market, as a matter of basic training.”</i></p>
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<p>ASSOC</p>	<p>Participants have never taken part in any soft skills training. They would be glad to participate in one.</p> <p>In addition to a clear procedure, a trained person is needed, who knows how to take care of PwDs in this sense, helping them develop their soft skills. This trained person should be their manager, their mentor. An informal leader is not a solution in developing soft skills. For PCWAs, the formal leader matters, because any difficulties they encounter are reported to him/her.</p> <p>ASSOC, for example, as a social organisation, has specialists such as social workers and vocational counsellors, and aims at social innovation and supporting people with vulnerabilities. Many of the association's employees are also trainers. Therefore, we believe that, within ASSOC, there would be people who could be trained in training others in order to develop soft skills for PwDs.</p>	<p>„As managers of spaces where PwDs work, it is essential for us to be trained on how to talk with them and how to guide them in developing soft skills.”</p> <p>„I have never taken part in any soft skills training before, but I would like to.”</p> <p>„ Policies, including this, must start from leadership positions. For us, as a large enterprise, it is a novelty and, although it seems difficult to implement it at the first discussion, I am sure that it would be appropriate.”</p>
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In big organisations, such as Aramis, it would be appropriate to implement a course for specialists, in order to support people with disabilities to develop soft skills, because this could lead to slowing turnover in the workplace and boosting production.

It would be opportune to discuss this aspect within the University of social work, even to have a course in which to train students and future social workers in the direction of the development of soft skills for people with disabilities in order to be hired and maintain a job.

<p>EASI</p>	<p>Even though they feel there is plenty of room for improvement in terms of soft skills, generally, but also related to and addressing PCWAs, participants have talked about organizations making efforts, organizing soft-skills trainings – especially in the private sector.</p> <p>They expressed that the development of soft skills should rather take place in the context of a PCWA treated equally with their colleagues, so as to not put them in the spotlight/victimize them. The accent should be put on having a new colleague that needs to be integrated, initiated in the work process.</p>	<p><i>“Companies should do training - for job skills and on the soft skills side, for mindset change, for employees who are going to work with the disabled person. They do training on hard skills, but also on soft skills. Including with their teams. The basic psychological needs are acceptance by the group, the need for belonging is basic.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>“Accessibility trainings address the relational environment of people with disabilities, because it matters how they feel. They get to relate to that group in a value-based way. We aim for a qualitative change in life.” (F, 49 y.o., Bucharest, public sector)</i></p> <p><i>“Integration training, to accept people with disabilities, is part of creating soft skills. They put them in a different position from the start - while they have to be treated as ordinary. They don't know, for example, they ask around, how should they behave with a visually impaired person.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p>
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		<p><i>“In the onboarding process - employees must be taught normality. If a person with a disability is treated as vulnerable, they are a victim. It's too inclusive an attitude. In general, approaches either make people vulnerable or create a sense of rejection.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>“ Onboarding for people with disabilities: we need to learn how to be equitable, inclusive with a PCWA, we need to provide them with that normality.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p>
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<p>HAND IN HAND</p>	<p>Assertive communication training - even if I can't quote you, I still have information from this.</p> <p>Team building is sorely lacking.</p> <p>During the training period, training is given for specific jobs, but there is less development on what makes someone a good logistics processor, for example.</p> <p>Employers want the employee to have these skills overall, e.g. to be able to work with customers, colleagues, it's a bit of an evidence. It is needed to do the job but gets less attention.</p> <p>There are several development projects: leadership training, individual development, training. Internal training is also provided, as well as individual development.</p> <p>A mentoring programme for workers with a disability: not only professional help, but also human support from a mentor to help them integrate. In principle, we do not discriminate between workers, everyone has the opportunity to do so, but for workers with a disability the attention is more personalised.</p>	<p>"There is a difference between a qualified worker and an enforcement worker. In the more qualified jobs there is an expectation, there is a demand."</p> <p>"There are improvements, however, and they are becoming more and more prominent alongside the material knowledge. Material knowledge is also important, because you can be a good carpenter, but if you can't communicate, you can't sell your product."</p> <p>"There is the possibility of individual signposting when an employee wants to go to a training course, and there are group training courses that we organise for managers."</p> <p>"An employee may have an external mentor (e.g. from a service provider) and an internal mentor or helper".</p>
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	<p>But in terms of soft skills training, my experience is that we have delivered the training, but the physical workers didn't like it. They don't like it in direct training, they can't identify with it. If we put it into training, that's okay, but otherwise they didn't enjoy it, they weren't motivated. For example, it's okay to be a playful exercise, but if you need self-reflection, it's hard to do. The classical training method is less realistic. It would also require intrinsic motivation that I want to improve and learn. If you are told that you have to sit there now and I will develop cooperation, that is not intrinsic motivation.</p> <p>I think personal feedback works if there is a good relationship between the manager and the employee</p> <p>I think there are good things in the gamification area, there is an opportunity here. Young people really like it, it doesn't always work for older people.</p> <p>Using apps is good instead of tests or group shouting.</p> <p>E-learning materials make the training more colourful, we have materials on soft skills such as time management and sensitisation for people with disabilities.</p>	<p>"In terms of soft skills training, my experience is that we have 'downloaded' the training, but the physical workers don't like it, they can't identify with it. If we put it into other types of training, it was okay. Otherwise they didn't enjoy it, they weren't motivated. It's acceptable to have a playful exercise, but when you need self-reflection, it's hard to do. The classical training method is less viable in this case. It would also require intrinsic motivation that I want to improve and learn. If you are told that you have to sit there now and I will develop cooperation, that is not intrinsic motivation."</p> <p>"We think in terms of short-term training, but that doesn't work, soft skill development works in the long term. Especially if you think about how long it takes to change a bad habit, for example. Here I would bring in support groups, where we take a look from time to time at what the goal is and where I am in that.</p> <p>It may not be necessary to do this in an employer, maybe a foundation or NGO is the right medium."</p>
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The first participant mentioned that any seminars are addressed mainly to the directors of the school, while the second participates in training courses that the organization schedules often. Further, among the other participants, one has not ever followed any training staff while the other often participates in coaching and mentoring courses or studied relative courses in the framework of their master studies.

Topic:	Key points	Examples (a key quote from the discussion)
Topic #4: Developing computer skills. Use of ICT in training programs		

<p>AFEJI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The medical-social sector had to adapt to the online training program following COVID. Prior to this period, all training programs, whether qualifying or not, were face-to-face. - The expectations are interactivity, short time, and visual attractiveness. A visual retranscription of the pedagogical content on the supports and especially the presence of a training (not e- learning). The duration of the training should extend over 2 days maximum or split the sessions if the training time is superior. A "rebound" session to evaluate the acquired knowledge is necessary. - As far as computer skills are concerned, the digital divide is tending to narrow and is no longer characteristic of a group of individuals. - Online courses make it easier to organize your work, especially since you don't have to travel to the training location. Short formats such as webinars make it possible to obtain specific information. <p>The disadvantages are eyestrain, lack of social connection, less investment; people are less receptive, turn off their camera.</p>	<p>"This reduces informal exchanges, questions about practices, there is no social link in our sector, which is a challenge.</p> <p>"A good dynamic in the group, in the exchanges, no top-down relationship with the trainer.</p> <p>"Previously, there was a difference in practices between generations, this is no longer the case.</p> <p>"The nominative and professional email established within AFEJI has facilitated access to the information tool."</p> <p>"They receive the information but don't exchange it"</p>
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<p>APROXIMAR</p>	<p>All (7) choose face-to-face course. Online makes it easier to reach more people, but in terms of quality, it has to be guaranteed.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity, as it can connect people from different points (greater coverage), the class can have participants from all corners of the country, or from several countries. - Flexibility, we can participate from anywhere. <p style="text-align: center;">Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Face-to-face interaction, discussion, expressions of direct contact and reading of expressions is not possible through the screen. - Little engagement thinking about learning, most are very self-guided. - 2 participants didn't consider online courses to be practical, they are very motivated students of online courses. - It takes greater discipline from the trainee himself in online courses. 	<p><i>“Courses that allow discussion and are regularly monitored by the trainer.”</i></p> <p><i>“A good example was a digital marketing course, for the third sector. Two and a half hours and it was very interactive, with those platforms that ask us questions. Some of individual answers others in teams.”</i></p> <p><i>“Trying to solve problems via debate in a group and presented to the larger group and then brainstorm</i></p> <p><i>make the trainer aware of how to deal with people with disabilities, focus not on the link between trainer and trainee”.</i></p>
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Recommendations for online courses:

- Have space to do practical exercises
- Have a space for sharing, reflections, clarifications
- Find a way to ensure people are in the right environment for the online course.
- Availability of the facilitator to answer the questions.
 - Enable group dynamics.
 - Must be interactive
- The focus cannot be just on the facilitator (expositive methodology).
- Be careful not to be too expositive and spend many hours listening to the facilitator
 - Create interaction tools, dynamics and games
- To guarantee the reflection and technical quality of the trainees' material.
- Interactions that generate networking, bond building and bring practical applicability to the proposal
 - Group dynamics and brainstorming.
- Make the trainer aware of how to deal with people with disabilities. Moreover PwD, depending on the disability, may not be able to attend online sessions without technical solutions.

<p>ASSOC</p>	<p>Most of the participants haven't participated in online training in the last year. Some said they participated 2 years ago, at the beginning of the pandemic, when the training was exclusively online, so they also have experience about online training. In the last year, in Romania, most of the training was done face to face.</p> <p>Some of them did participate in an online training program last year. Yet, all of them can give their opinion in the field.</p> <p>Clearly, courses with a small total number of hours, or with a shorter duration in time, are preferred.</p> <p>For what concerns interactive training, for example, a technique would be „zoom rooms” in which trainees can work on topics in teams and the trainer is frequently entering in the room to ask questions or to validate practices.</p> <p>Online training is flexible, but they should be more interactive so that the participants would be more involved.</p>	<p>„I participated in online courses for more than a year, during university, due to the pandemic. Honestly, I have mixed feelings about this. It was fine too, because I could attend classes from anywhere, even while I was working. On the other hand, my participation in the moments when I was working on something else was partial. I don't think it's the best way to learn, but it was the best way to continue our educational process in the situation we were facing.”</p>
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<p>EASI</p>	<p>Online learning is perceived as having the following advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highly accessible – especially following the pandemic, during which digital skills are necessary for remote working. ● Flexible – participants can choose when to study (if asynchronous). <p>And perceived disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Less interactive - is not providing sufficient human interaction. E.g. for overcoming the human interaction: checking in via Whatsapp Video with the trainer/-s, having some in-person meetings (in accessible places). <p>A training program is expected to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - highly interactive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to include practical exercises to apply knowledge, ○ to offer opportunities to interact with other participants to the course and with the trainers. This is especially relevant since PCWAs are perceived as being socially isolated. 	<p><i>more than one session on a theme - maximum of one hour would be enough and there should be continuous feedback from participants.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>„Online interactivity is a must. Duration needs to be adjusted, communication of the event, the project. Lots of communication and well targeted.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>„I would see a set of workshops organized on a theme. Which would interest you? Which would bring you value? Always need to ask what brings value.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p> <p><i>„The offline sessions were more productive - they got tired of sitting between the walls. We can find out how they want to meet, through a questionnaire or focus group. The need for socialising is great. They come with certain tasks, they have so much to say and share.” (F, 46 y.o., Bucharest, private sector)</i></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In a hybrid form (both online and in person) - the course could provide an excellent opportunity for them to overcome isolation and exercise their soft skills in person – which would also ensure the success of the course. For e.g., in-person meetings could take place at the beginning, middle and end of the course (for evaluation), in an accessible location for participants, to allow for relationship building, networking. Of course, online could also provide an advantage in terms of accessibility and flexibility of learning. - Constantly adapted to the participants, following recurrent and constant feedback sessions for improvement – this could ensure the success of the course, but also the retention/motivation of the participants. Feedback about: duration, ease of understanding, potential issues, topics approached, practical exercises, quality of support from the trainers, etc. (through a questionnaire or organization of periodical feedback discussions). - Maximum duration of 1 online session – 1 hour. <p>Split in workshops on certain subjects (modules)</p>	<p><i>„We're also talking about relatives, families, etc. It's not just about funding, but what we're discussing, if it goes well, influences the lives of hundreds of people.” (M, 50 y.o., Teleorman, private sector)</i></p>
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<p>HAND IN HAND</p>	<p>The concept of learning through ICT is not clear to workers. For example, they are not aware if they have learned something from a video.</p> <p>According to employers and trainers: short films can help to understand situations and help with coping strategies.</p> <p>Videos are good for repetition, or if you need to learn something later, it's good to have a visual aid. It can be good for later help, for deepening. It is important to be personal in the gist.</p> <p>It is also a good option for group work.</p> <p>It is important for training to be interactive for practice. The online format is good because some people cannot take part in a face-to-face situation and it is easier for them to participate.</p> <p>Alternating between large and small group work can also work well in online training. It was necessary to move from the large group to smaller rooms, to work together, to communicate, to bring back the experience to the large group. It can have a good developmental effect.</p>	<p>"I learnt about computers online, I watched videos, but others also told me how to do it. I also learned how to use a smart phone in a month. I've filled in questionnaires. I can download."</p> <p>"The assertive communication training was semi-online, in a hybrid solution."</p> <p>"I don't do much about it."</p> <p>"I used duolingo to learn a language, now I use a video platform."</p> <p>"I am still worried that I give too much paper and it will be abandoned. The online material can be a help later on, to deepen the study material. But it is important to be personal with the substance."</p> <p>"Using online tools can also be useful for group work."</p>
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All participants agreed on the idea that the digital tools play an important role on the training procedure. More specifically, the digital tools offer many positive aspects, mainly as regards the participation of both people living in remote areas and people with disabilities. Nevertheless, it is important for an interactivity to be adopted, as the online teaching and training do not offer the depth required between the trainer and the trainee.