

Professional integration of people with disabilities



A disabled employee in the carpentry workshop

Project name

Gaia Vocational Rehabilitation Centre

Project duration

Annual programme

ESF priority area

Social inclusion

Country

Portugal

ESF funding

€3,875,618

Total funding

€5,167,491

ESF funding type

Objective 1

Target group

People with disabilities

Name of coordinating organisation

Gaia Vocational Rehabilitation Centre

Contact name

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An organisation in northern Portugal is challenging the view that people with disabilities cannot have an active social and professional life. Every year almost 2,000 people access their services, which include vocational training programmes and support for finding a job or setting up in business.

Disability has traditionally been seen from a medical viewpoint as something that needs to be treated. The Gaia Vocational Rehabilitation Centre (CRPG) in northern Portugal, however, takes a very different perspective.

"As we see it, disability is not the cause of the problem, it is rather the relationship between disabled people and their environment," says Jerónimo de Sousa, director of CRPG. "We are therefore working not only to help disabled people develop their capacities, but also to change the way society, and particularly employers, view disability."

Working in partnership

CRPG was established in 1992, as the result of a partnership between the Institute for Training and Employment, a governmental agency, and two private organisations run by and for people with disabilities. Today they have almost 2,000 clients per year, to whom they offer a range of services from rehabilitation and the prescription of technical aids, to vocational training and employment support.

"In 2002-2003, we conducted a survey to evaluate the impact of the vocational rehabilitation services on clients' quality of life," says Mr. de Sousa. "We interviewed some 2,500 people with disabilities who have used, or are using those services. Almost all respondents claimed that, since taking part in CRPG and other institutions' activities, they participate more in society, they vote more, and that their economic situation has improved."

Creating self-employment

One of the employment support services offered by CRPG is assistance with setting up a telework business. Established two years ago, 18 people with disabilities have now completed the programme and another 10 have just started. "We provide facilities and technical support as well as training in business management and contacting and negotiating with clients," says Mr. de Sousa.

A wide range of vocational training options are also on offer, tailored to individual needs and rehabilitation plans. Of the 770 clients that completed a vocational training between 1992 and 2003, 70% have either found work or set up their own business. Sheltered employment is also available in a carpentry workshop run by CRPG, where 14 of the 22 employees are disabled.

"We are appealing to the 'socially-responsible' consumer market, as well as being competitive in price and quality," says Mr. de Sousa.