

ACCESSIBILITY KILLS THE DISABILITY!

A paradigm-shift is under way in our perception of disability. Where we previously tended to generalise and talk about "a disabled person", we are now more likely to perceive the inaccessible environment and discouraging attitudes as the disabling factor. After all "defining" the whole person just by his or her disability would be very inappropriate. Most disabled individuals can be as mobile and effective as their able bodied peers providing their environment is accessible and they are afforded equal opportunities in accessing education and employment. The Hungarian Development Partnership (DP) "Variations for Rehabilitation Employment" ([Motáváció](#))^[1] is based on this very idea, by providing disabled people with skills that would make them independent and competitive in an open labour market.

Motáváció DP works with its clients on the basis of an equal partnership involving active co-operation from both sides. At the same time it works to promote acceptance of independent living and to make it a reality in Hungary. As opposed to looking for ways of doing things *for* the "disabled", the DP provides a complex and coordinated range of services requested by its stakeholders to assist them with their active integration into social and economic life. The principal challenge of the DP is to change the attitudes of society, which tends to put the meaningless and belittling stamp "handicapped" on disabled individuals instead of offering them equal opportunities to pursue their individual path towards skills development through guidance and targeted lifelong learning (LLL). The direct consequences of these attitudes are exclusion, resulting in a sense of isolation and a loss of self confidence. The DP, led by the MOTIVÁCIÓ Foundation, is trying to break this vicious circle by offering a range of services intended to bring disabled individuals out of this perceived "security" into a competitive market position through information, guidance and training. The Partnership's services include guidance from an individual mentor to assist in solving personal problems, provide individual career planning, access to support services (transport and personal assistance) and professional help for workplace integration. Motáváció is also assisting employers in creating an accessible working environment (practical accessibility planning).

FIGHTING EXCLUSION ON ALL FRONTS

The Motáváció Partnership has identified four target groups as the main clients for its services:

- People employed in sheltered workplaces;
- Young disabled people without previous work experience;
- Decision makers, policy makers and politicians;
- Employers and employees of the enterprises taking part in the DP's activities.

"The lesson we have learned until today, in simple terms, is that our target groups are in a much worse situation than we had previously thought," said Mr. István Dávid the leader of Motáváció DP: *"When we planned our project, we did not expect the situation to be so bad. In future, we have to put much more emphasis on rebuilding self-esteem by building motivation and self-confidence. We must help them to be active, as this is much more important than before. EQUAL and other projects we participate in, deal with labour market integration. What we have is an alarming situation – masses of people are not able to access employment, or even to get near to the labour market, because of psychological problems and skills shortages, resulting from years of being perceived as "handicapped" and being denied access to basic skills training and labour market services. As a result of this, we are not able to move forward as quickly as we had hoped."*

PROVIDING MORE COMPETITIVE PROFILES

Much of the inherent passivity in the DP's target groups is due to current labour market practices and policies, in particular through State subsidised employment or so called 'sheltered work places', which were the norm in Hungary for a long time. Sheltered employment means that

disabled people receive fixed monthly salaries that are approximately half the country's average wage in return for a "secured" workplace. This work, which provides additional revenue to the disability subsidy[2] entails doing simple tasks with no qualification requirements, but offers no opportunities for personal or career development and salary progression. This system had its benefits – a pool of cheap labour considered beneficial for the country's economy and relatively permanent employment opportunities for the disabled individuals. As the companies were subsidised by the number of disabled or 'reduced capacity' workers employed, the employees were paid for being there rather than for the added value of their work.

However, the present economic situation of increasingly globalised markets and competition has led to a restructuring of this sector. The number of companies offering sheltered employment is decreasing. Companies now have to survive and prove their efficiency in the context of a free market. State subsidies have been channelled away from companies, which now only receive compensation for reduced productivity and are paid directly to the employee. Companies now have to be much more focussed on reorienting their production processes towards more competitive market segments and reskilling their workers to meet such new demands.

In this context Motáváció DP offers training to the people already employed in the sheltered work places to provide them with opportunities to improve their skills and career prospects. Two of the DP's partners, ROLFIM COOPERATION and SANYI, are sheltered employment organisations undergoing restructuring. Within the VRE project, these companies are receiving support in up-skilling their staff with the assistance of another key project partner SZTÁV – one of the most prominent and experienced professional training providers in Hungary. The first five ROLFIM employees are currently taking part in SZTÁV's three-month training module in the recycling of electronic waste materials. Upon successful completion of the course, trainees will receive a State Certificate in this new and increasingly demanded skills profile. After completing their training, the up-skilled workers will be employed in ENVIROINVEST-WASTE, another partner of the DP, which is competing openly on the market. Thus Motáváció Partnership is drawing a two-fold benefit from the course: firstly by promoting the development of a skill-set which is crucial to enhance environmental sustainability and secondly, by creating a new competitive employment field for disabled individuals with future growth and career prospects.



Training at the carpet weaving workshop

SANYI is another company taking part in the DP's activities. It employs 350 individuals with various disabilities reduced capacity to work. In the framework of the EQUAL programme and in close cooperation with SZTÁV, SANYI provides training to its employees in two main areas: a carpet weaving course involving 12 participants and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) lessons for 8 people. Both of these skill sets are currently in demand in Hungary, due to the

development of tourism (and the rising demand for traditional folklore products) as well as increasing general use of ICTs. Both courses last for one year and take place in Fulpaszallas, a village in a disadvantaged region of central Hungary. This is the first training of its kind in Hungary taking place outside the capital. Apart from providing professional skills, which are currently in demand and sustainable in the future, this DP activity also contributes to the development of the region and its workforce.

Within Motáváció, the companies taking part in the Partnership also get the opportunity to improve the accessibility of their work environment, which makes them more accessible to different groups of employees. During the EQUAL project, ENVIROINVEST has made its workshops more accessible and now they are also adapted to the needs of severely disabled individuals, which according to Ms. Isabella Kaloczy, representative of the company, has meant opportunities for business. Ms. Laura Csapo from ROLFIM also confirmed:

A participant of the DP's carpet weaving workshop with the ready-made product

"During the EQUAL project, we have made our plant more accessible. We have built a new pavement suitable for wheelchairs. For visually impaired workers, we have introduced sharp colour edges for guidance. We have also installed ramps for all physically disabled



employees with mobility difficulties." The SANYI carpet weaving workshop building in Fulpszallas was also made accessible during the lifetime of the project.

Ms. Erzsébet Győr from SZTÁV, the oldest and one of the biggest adult education providers in Hungary, emphasised that the main challenge with the training is the individual's lack of courage to participate.

"Workers have a lot of fears and prejudices concerning this kind of project, because of their situation in Hungary," said Ms. Győr: "People are used to a certain employment security and reconciled with the low salaries and living standards. For a lot of them modest passivity has become something of a lifestyle. In this context it is hard to convince people to take up this new challenge." It was Ms. Csapo's task to select people for the training among the ROLFIM employees. "They feared of not being able to complete this course," she said: "They were used to a certain comfort and security. I tried to convince them by arguing that taking part would improve their opportunities in life. As the national structures change, the training can ensure their employment prospects and quality of life in the future. Also the attitudes they will develop will make it easier for them in the future – they will gain new skills that they may use and also transfer to their friends and family."

The representatives of the Motáváció DP partners all expressed the hope that the success of the participants on the present courses will motivate other employees of the companies to undertake the same training. All three companies offer mentoring services during the training and individual guidance for those participants who need more practice to progress. Ms. Győr asserted: "We are optimistic about the success of the courses, but it will require a lot of work. We hope that the courses will also positively change the attitudes of other training participants. We already see the change – in the carpet weaving course, the participants have already formed collegial relationships and are much more open in their attitudes and in sharing ideas." She also said that the people participating in the courses have achieved a certain prestige. They have managed to make the change not only in their own attitudes, but have also changed the way disabled people are regarded in the surrounding communities, factories and the school, where the ICT courses take place.

EUROPEAN BUSINESS ASSISTANTS

SZTÁV is also involved in another Motáváció DP activity - European Business Assistant (EBA) training. This course is newly designed for disabled young people, who do not yet possess any work experience. It is intended to provide them with business English, ICT training and business-related knowledge relevant for work in a European business environment^[3]. Apart from the theory, the programme envisages the placement of participants in "intermediary workplaces" during the course, with post-training employment possibilities.



Participants of the Partnership's 2006 European Business Assistant course

The training has been a 100 per cent success so far – 36 visually impaired young people have already graduated the course and are all employed now. And - based on feed back of the participants - the training has even been improved since the first courses by making the training more flexible; the different levels of knowledge of the participants are now taken into account and the previous all-day modules have been skipped. "I think the

mistakes of the first training course are natural and I am sure the modules of second and third training courses will be better organised. In general it is a very good course and I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this project," said Mr János Garami, an electrician and one of the first participants of EBA.

Another EBA trainee Ms. Melinda Juhasz said: "I appreciate the investment of the teachers. All of the subjects that they teach are relevant and will help a great deal in passing the final exam. They are sensitive and adapted to the pace of the pupils." Mr. Garami confirmed the relevance and the quality of the training: "The legal knowledge course was also good. It was taught by a blind lawyer, good but strict. Now I have a very good picture of Hungarian legal, fiscal and customs affairs. A lot of this knowledge is already useful now."

The DP, EBA participants and their teachers together have come a long way in improving the training programme. Although there still seems to be more room for improvements in the internal coordination and interconnectivity of the various EBA training modules as well as the marketing of the course among the possible vocational training providers, the initial experience of the training activities looks promising. Just like Mr Sándor Kolessery, electrician by education, working in theatre in the evening and attending the EBA courses during the day, other training participants are eager to use the possibilities provided by Hungary's entry in the European Union. With the EBA training they will be better equipped to realise this dream.

MAINSTREAMING – WORK WITH POLICY MAKERS AND EMPLOYERS

Finally, the DP is reaching out to address policy makers and employers, or in fact anyone who is in the position to create new structures, laws and rules with the main aim of improving the lives of disabled individuals, promoting the accessibility of public and private spaces alike and creating more inclusive legal frameworks. For this purpose Motáváció together with other Hungarian DPs have created a National thematic network (NTN), in which they mainstream the issues important to disabled individuals and those with reduced working ability. The network has identified six working themes:

- The first one is the preparation of a handbook (methodology manual), which assembles all the training methods used for the different NTN's target groups. A similar manual will be produced on the specific training approaches developed for different types of disabilities.
- The second, the Accessibility Project, constitutes a part of the Motáváció's activities and includes inspections and assessment of the accessibility of the public buildings in Hungary. So far the DP has surveyed 1000 buildings in Budapest and produced an evaluation of each building according to various types of accessibility criteria (access to parking, accessibility of the building for wheelchairs, access of elevators and restrooms) presented in a form that is easy to understand. According to these criteria, roughly only one fifth of all the buildings in the capital are considered to be accessible, one fifth are partially accessible and the remaining three fifth inaccessible. The DP is planning to repeat the survey in the upcoming years, hoping that these proportions will change in favour of access for disabled individuals. Within the context of the Accessibility project the DP is also providing advice services to public authorities and employers on how they could improve the accessibility of their institutions. The Partnership has "rehabilitation engineers", who are themselves disabled ready to prepare an "accessibility plan" for these clients.
- The rest of the themes are: a study comparing Employment policies, labour markets and the situation in providing equal rights for disabled people and people with reduced working capacity in Hungary and other European Member States, a publication for the general public on how to correctly assist a disabled person, a workbook for the training of personal assistants and a manual for employment rehabilitation services. This manual, including documentation, training materials, surveys, and experience developed by the Motáváció Partnership could be used to create new employment rehabilitation services for disabled people and people with reduced working capacity in the future.

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Link to the ECDB: Variations for employment rehabilitation [HU-15](#)

[1] Please, find more information on this DP in the EQUAL Common Database (ECDB) under the DP Id. [HU-15](#).

[2] This subsidy amounts on average to 40.000 HUF or around €150, however it may vary depending on the age of a person and the severity of her or his disability.

[3] List of subjects taught: Statistics, Book keeping, Financial affairs, Marketing, English, Economics, IT skills, commerce, secretarial tasks, legal knowledge.