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DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Peer Country Comments Paper - Austria

PES Services for employers: Focussing on competences of persons with disabilities is key for success

Peer Review on "Employer service delivery"

26-28 October 2020

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1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Employer service delivery" within the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme. It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the host country and the situation in Austria.

2 Situation in the peer country

2.1 Institutional responsibility

In the federal state of Austria, responsibilities on social and labour market integration for people with disabilities (PwD) are shared between different stakeholders. Policies are implemented both for PwD and enterprises. The main two actors offering services to enterprises (counselling and subsidies) regarding the integration of PwD into the labour market are the operating authority under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection *Sozialministeriumservice* (SMS) and the Public Employment Service Austria (*Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich* - AMS).

Issues related to PwD are a horizontal issue in Austria. Accordingly, also other actors such as the federal provinces (Länder) have competences (Sozialministerium, 2018). Generally, competences between public institutions are split. The institutions cooperate with each other (and with additional actors such as NGOs) at the national level as well as at the regional, the sub-regional and local levels.

The SMS, with its nine provincial offices in the capitals of the federal provinces (*Länder*) is the central point of contact of the federal government for PwD, persons with illnesses or other disadvantages. The AMS is a service provider company under public law and is divided into one federal, nine regional and 98 local organisations. There are two main departments, the *Service for Enterprises* (SFU) and the *Service for Job Seekers* (SFA). At the end of 2018, 6,260 staff members were employed in both departments, of which 2,041 were part-time employed (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019a).

To sum up, both AMS and SMS are offering services to companies aiming at labour market integration of PwD. Since the AMS applies disability mainstreaming (i.e. PwD can take advantage of the entire range of services offered by the AMS as long as they are available for placement in the labour market), specific needs of the target group are met in more detail and in higher intensity by some offers of the SMS (e.g. project funding of SMS; Interview 1).

2.2 Labour market situation

Austria records a growing demand for labour. The AMS reacts by increasing the referrals of jobseekers who obtained further qualifications through the AMS, expanding cross-regional referrals as well as increasing assistance to enterprises in raising qualification of their own staff in 2018 (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019a).

The unemployment rate in Austria was 4.9% in 2018 (a reduction of 0.6% in comparison to 2017), with Austria ranking ninth across the EU 28.¹ In the course of 2018, the number of persons affected by unemployment (918,119) decreased by 35,270 or 3.7% in comparison with 2017. The number of affected men was with 518,077 higher than that of women (400,075; Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019a).

At the end of 2019, 385,500 people have been issued a pass for person with disability² (total population of Austria: approximately 8,8 million). PwD as well as their relatives

¹ In 2018, the total unemployment rate according to ILO definition was 7,7% (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019).

² The pass for person with disabilities is an official ID card which is proof of a disability (regardless of the type of disability). The pass for person with disabilities can be obtained by the persons whose normal place of residence is Austria and whose degree of disability or reduction of ability to work is at least 50%

and caring persons thus are a political and economic factor.³ In 2018, 73,611 people with health restrictions were registered unemployed by the AMS on average (in total, 155,595 people with health restrictions were registered for at least one day at the AMS in 2018). The share of registered unemployed with health-related employment limitations of all registered unemployed was 24% in 2018 (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019b). According to the AMS, the number of unemployed people under the Disability Employment Act (see below) increased by 29.5% between 2013 and 2016.⁴ Recent data show a further increase of PwD and persons with health-related placement handicaps (2019: 82,898; unemployment rate of 8,0%)⁵. The Austrian National Council of Persons with Disabilities, an umbrella organisation of the associations of PwD in Austria, informs that PwD rarely have been benefiting from the recovering of the crisis of the Austrian labour market. Women are still more heavily affected by the situation than men; there is a pay-gap between women and men of almost 16% (Österreichischer Behindertenrat, 2018).

The Disability Employment Act (Behinderteneinstellungsgesetz) regulates protection against discrimination in employment relationships (including applications) and otherwise in the world of work (vocational training, careers advice, access to self-employment; Sozialministerium, 2018). The Act defines the obligation to employ PwD for businesses with more than 24 employees⁶ (only 2.9% of all Austrian firms fall under this category). For each quota-place that is not filled a compensatory levy must be paid (*Ausgleichstaxe*). The levy is collected in a fund, which finances support measures for PwD and their employers for occupational and social rehabilitation and integration (Fuchs et al., 2018). From all enterprises with more than 24 employees, only about 22% employ a PwD; all others prefer to free themselves from their obligation by paying a compensatory tax amounting to at least EUR 257 per month for each PwD who is not employed (Österreichischer Behindertenrat, 2018).

3 National policies and measures

3.1 Policy overview

Disability policy in Austria is framed and designed in line with the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁷ (UNCRPD), the Europe 2020 Strategy⁸ as well as the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020⁹ and the National Action Plan on Disability 2012-2020¹⁰ (Sozialministerium, 2016).

Depending on the type of measure, the availability for placement, the degree of disability, the beneficiary status and the registration at the AMS are of relevance for public support of the actors such as the AMS, SMS, and the Länder. There are offers from both departments of the AMS: while the SFA supports the counselling of PwD, employer advisors (from the SFU department) consult enterprises concerning hiring PwD and the offered recruitment channels (Interview 2).

(Sozialministerium, 2018; Data from Interview 1). Please note that the pass for persons with disabilities is not to be equated with any affiliation according to the Disability Employment Act (see below).

³ <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Soziales/Menschen-mit-Behinderungen.html>

⁴ <https://www.behindertenrat.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Arbeitsmarktdaten-2013-2017.xlsx> (accessed 19 February 2020).

⁵ Data provided during Interview 1.

⁶ For each 25th employee in the enterprise one PwD must be employed that has been issued a formal decision on their status under the Act.

⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/eip/ageing/standards/general/general-documents/european-disability-strategy-2010-2020_en

¹⁰ <https://www.sozialministerium.at/en/Topics/Social-Affairs/People-with-Disabilities/National-Action-Plan-on-Disability.html>

The SFU informs in its folder on employment of PwD - a 2-pager that regularly is updated and presented to enterprises at various occasions such as during company visits - about legal aspects (e.g. obligation of employers to hire PwD, employment protection legislation, fiscal benefits and bonuses for enterprises) and subsidies offered by the SMS and the AMS (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2020). The folder also serves companies which already employ disadvantaged persons or would like to do so in the future (Sozialministerium, 2018).

In general, the AMS follows a **competence-centred approach**. This means that emphasis is put on personal strengths of jobseekers regardless of their socioeconomic status or other individual characteristics (Interview 2). This is of specific importance for the employment of PwD due to existing restraints of employers in hiring PwD.¹¹ The AMS aims at **raising awareness** of (possible) employers of the potentials of individuals and, in doing so, reducing uncertainty on the side of the employers and updating their knowledge on legal aspects regarding the employment of PwD. To provide an example, not having to pay the fees of the quota-system is observed as a motivating factor for hiring PwD (Interview 2). The variety of AMS measures ranges from outreaching to employers to counselling services and placement offers (job acquisition, job advertisement, job description, job recruitment, etc.); all of which aim at reducing barriers and enhancing employment of PwD.

Moreover, responding to the **specific needs of the PwD** is regarded a key to achieve social and labour market integration of PwD and to best match labour market supply and demand. Policy measures are available in various formats including **integration chains**; (i.e. measures that follow each other in a sequence, partly provided by different actors). For example, an integration pathway for PwD can comprise Any AMS measure; *a financial bonus for enterprises (Inklusionsförderung / InklusionsförderungPlus)*; Compensation allowance (*Entgeltzuschuss*). Please find a brief description of these measures in the following:

- **Any AMS measure:** As informed, in line with the principle of disability mainstreaming, PwD can take advantage of the entire range of services offered by the AMS. The services offered by the SFA include needs-based information on training and careers; comprehensive advice and support in the search for a suitable job; individually-customised skills training or employment subsidies and support measures; and, under certain circumstances, benefits to ensure the person's subsistence (unemployment benefit or unemployment assistance; Sozialministerium, 2018).
- **Financial bonus for enterprises** (*Inklusionsförderung; InklusionsförderungPlus*; offered by the SMS): enterprises employing PwD who has participated in any AMS measure can request a subsidy amounting to 30% of the gross wage per month (equal to the social security contributions) for two months. Enterprises with less than 25 employees can receive the financial bonus (*Inklusionsförderung*) (30% of the gross wage per month plus 25% supplement). Since 1 January 2020 companies receive a financial bonus for employing female PwD independently from the enterprise size (*InklusionsförderungPlus*).
- **Compensation allowance** (*Entgeltzuschuss*; offered by the SMS): This allowance can be requested for compensating productivity losses of employment of PwD. It can succeed the *Inklusionsförderung / InklusionsförderungPlus*.

Corresponding to the needs-based approach, there is state support available for enterprises when employing particular groups of society such as apprentices with disabilities. Measures for this target group include:

¹¹ According to Interview 1 people with mental impairments are particularly affected because "they are not welcomed". Public support thus is essential for enhancing social and labour market integration.

- **Award for enterprises** (*Prämie*; offered by the SMS): Enterprises can receive an award for the employment of apprentices with disabilities financed by the quota fund.
- **Financial bonus for apprentices** (*Inklusionsbonus für Lehrlinge*; offered by SMS): Companies employing PwD (with the pass for person with disabilities) can apply for this bonus that is offered for the entire apprenticeship and is regarded as supplement to the award mentioned above.
- **Apprenticeship subsidy** (*Lehrstellenförderung*; offered by the AMS): Enterprises and training providers can receive a subsidy for costs occurring during the apprenticeship.

Other policy measures available for enterprises encompass (the list is not exhaustive):

- **Support on taking up employment** (*Eingliederungsbeihilfe*; offered by the AMS): Companies can receive a subsidy when employing PwD. The amount and duration differ depending on regional conditions and guidelines on the allocation of subsidies.
- **Job protection allowance** (*Arbeitsplatzsicherungszuschuß*; offered by the SMS): In case a job of a PwD is at risk the enterprise can receive a subsidy for wages and training (max. EUR 801.- per month).
- **Workplace adaptation** (offered by the SMS): Allowances for adapting workplaces to demands of the PwD (barrier-free design of the workplace).
- **Fit2work** (Counselling service for unemployed/employees and enterprises; jointly offered by AMS and SMS): A counselling and secondary prevention service for PwD, chronic diseases or other health impairments as well as for employers was introduced in 2011. The programme aims at preserving or restoring the ability to work and at enabling a rapid occupational (re)entry by early intervention. fit2work is coordinated by the SMS in cooperation with partner organisations (e.g. AMS; Fuchs et al., 2018).

Finally, there are project funding possibilities available for project promoters (not for enterprises as such) that aim at preparing PwD for entering the regular labour market (see NEBA below). As part of these measures, contacts with enterprises and matching options between jobs and potential employees are conducted.

The planned budget for 2020 for the social participation and professional integration of PwD as part of the SMS amounts to EUR 255 million (Interview 1). The costs for measures aiming at enhancing employment for PwD as part of the active labour market policy in Austria offered by the AMS reached the amount of EUR 318 million in 2018 (Interview 2). The implementation of the variety of measures offered by the different actors aims at creating win-win situations for both enterprises and PwD.

There are **many similarities** between services offered in Austria and those of the PES in the Netherlands. The trial placements, for instance, look a lot like the Austrian measure 'Job training & job trials'; the wage dispensation in the Netherlands resembles the 'Compensation allowance' and the 'Support on taking up employment' of the SMS in Austria; and the Dutch measure 'On-the-job coaching' may be contrastable with the Austrian 'Occupational assistance' (*Arbeitsassistenz*). The latter measure is implemented by the SMS together with its partners. Already now, enterprises are receiving comprehensive services due to this measure and it is planned to even further expand the enterprise-focussed offers during 2020+ (*Weiterentwicklung der Arbeitsassistenz - Unternehmenszentriertes Angebot*). The European Social Fund (ESF) is used in the programme period 2014 – 2020 for the co-financing of measures for young people as part of the Occupational Assistance scheme. In the Occupational Assistance Network (*Netzwerk Berufliche Assistenz*, NEBA) measures such as youth coaching, production schools, vocational training assistance, vocational assistance and job coaching are offered together with project organisers especially for the target group of

young people with disabilities in the transition phase from school to work (Sozialministerium, 2018).

Similarities concern also the approaches applied in Austria and in the Netherlands, which both aim at **raising awareness** of employers on the advantages of employment of PwD. The added value for firms includes gained competences of the PwD, financial and fiscal benefits as well as non-monetary support (counselling, matching, etc.). An evaluation conducted by the AMS in 2013 regarding their annually implemented and public visible business tour, called 'AMS on tour', confirmed that the employment of PwD was discussed between the AMS and the enterprises by seven out of ten enterprises (Marketmind, 2013; see also Annual report of the AMS 2013¹²). Raising awareness and providing useful information for companies as well as PwD are constantly in the AMS focus (Interview 2).

First show **satisfaction** for the AMS services: *"In Austria (...), the focus on personal contacts with employers has resulted in high satisfaction rates amongst employers. The involvement of employer counsellors in the manual pre-selection of job candidates, and job mediation, seems to contribute to higher quality matching"* (Oberholzer, 2018, p.16). In 2018, 76,388 enterprises required the services of the AMS and announced 567,195 vacancies via the AMS (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019d).

Similarities between the approaches applied in the two countries do not only concern policy measures, but also the implementation at the multilevel governance scale. Decentralized approaches (i.e. work with branches of organisations at the regional, sub-regional and local levels) are used. Also, **shared responsibility** between actors is practiced in both countries. Both PES seem to take over similar roles, but the partners vary.¹³ While cooperation between the municipalities and the PES in the Netherlands is formalised and legally binding via the Act SUWI and the Participation Act, responsibilities in AT are split, too. And, as soon as it comes to funding activities binding contracts are established (e.g. between the AMS and the firms similar to the Jobs Agreement in the Netherlands or between the SMS and project promoters, etc.).

As in the Netherlands, the success of the applied approach varies in the countries' subregions (Marketmind, 2013) and strongly depends on **close (personnel) cooperation** between the actors involved at all governance levels (AMS counsellors and SMS contact points¹⁴; Interview 1 and 2). Accordingly, coordination between the public actors to best use synergies was mentioned as ongoing challenge during the interviews in Austria.

Main differences may concern the scope and comprehensiveness of the measures offered by the public, the competence-centred approach applied by the AMS as well as the integration chains available in Austria.

3.2 Strengths

The main strengths of the Austrian approach are the **variety of measures** offered to enterprises, as well as the preparation and support measures for PwD in entering the regular labour market and accompanying them during the job. Concerning the support of employers, company visits are reported to be a key for success (Interview 2).

To be successful, this however requires a **well-functioning cooperation between institutions**, in order to ensure teamwork between agencies and advanced networking (e.g. proactive spreading of information by the PES counsellors).

¹²https://www.ams.at/content/dam/download/gesch%C3%A4ftsberichte/oesterreich/archiv-gesch%C3%A4ftsberichte/001_geschaeftsbericht_2013.pdf

¹³ In NL between the PES and municipalities; in AT between the AMS, the SMS and the Länder.

¹⁴ Key account managers are to be installed as single point of contact for the SMS services for enterprises in the frame of the further expansion of the *Occupational assistance* scheme.

3.3 Challenges and weaknesses

The above-mentioned strengths bear challenges and weaknesses. The **interplay between actors** is core for success but varies between regions. Ongoing communication, coordination and **interface management** at central level as well as at regional/local levels is needed. In federal states such as Austria and the Netherlands overlapping areas between actors and between different governance levels should be used for the benefit of the PwD.

Moreover, there are challenges faced regarding the **quality of data** (Österreichischer Behindertenrat, 2018; Interview 2 regarding the filling of competences of PwD). The usage of data regarding companies paying compensatory levy (Ausgleichstaxe) is currently being examined by the AMS. In line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the AMS plans to prepare data from the quota system to specifically address enterprises paying fees within the scope of the AMS department SFU in near future. This process, however, also bears pitfalls that need to be avoided (e.g. PwD may have not announced their disability within the firm officially; Interview 2).

Another challenge refers to the **quality and sustainability of jobs** created and filled by PwD (Weber, 2012). In general, data on the quality of jobs are not at hand, and, though sustainable jobs are aimed at by both AMS and SMS, respective data are absent. Since sustainability of employment is key also the abuse of public benefits is monitored (Interview 2). Moreover, the interpretation of the term 'sustainability' is controversial. To provide an example: though the AMS has set a target indicator in 2020 for the 'sustainable taking up of employment of PwD', sustainability in this sense refers to work that exceeds two months.

Finally, **job carving** was pointed out as a possible approach applied in near future (Interview 1), yet both countries could benefit from enhanced job carving (and job crafting) offers. These approaches have proved being effective strategies to overcome the challenges of the labour market (re)integration of people facing barriers such as PwD, and to keep workers employed by creating meaningful and productive employment (Scoppetta et al., 2019).

3.4 Lessons learnt

PES counselling activities need to be well-connected between services for enterprises and jobseekers as well as with external stakeholders. The closer these units are interconnected (e.g. mailing lists) the better and more sustainable are the placement results (Interview 2). **Active engagement of PES staff** thus is crucial.

As mentioned above, networking and coordination between actors should be enhanced and processes streamlined to make best use of all available resources for the benefit of the PwD and the enterprises. In the case of the 'Occupational Assistance' a need is observed by project promoters for **cooperation agreements** between the SMS and the AMS and other actors such as the social insurance institutions. Also, cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and the SMS could be envisaged (Interview 1).

Finally, **supported employment** is needed to increase participation rates of PwD. Political will to support vulnerable groups and reduce poverty as was suggested by the new Austrian government (Austrian Government Programme 2020-2024¹⁵) thus is crucial for success.

4 Assessment of success factors and transferability

4.1 Success factors

The following success factors are identified:

¹⁵ <https://www.bmoeds.gv.at/Ministerium/Regierungsprogramm.html>

- To proactively inform companies about options and possibilities on time (measures, actions, funding, funding requirements, etc.);
- To generate high data quality (data from firms as well as from PwD) while in parallel ensuring data protection regulations (GDPR);
- To activate persons searching for a job and emphasize on the competences the individuals bring; and
- To offer grants/comprehensive support measures that enable for individual adjustments according to the needs of both, the employers and the employees.

4.2 Transferability

The *Broadcasting Campaign 'Ö3 Apprenticeship* (Ö3 Lehrstellenaktion; see Austrian example in the Annex) may be of specific interest to the PES in the Netherlands since it assisted reducing the restraints of employers in hiring PwD - not in terms of direct numbers matched but of minimising the negative (deficit oriented) view on employment for PwD in enterprises.

Support measures implemented in AT by both departments of the AMS, the SFA and the SFU, as well as by the SMS are transferable since there are many similarities to the measures applied by the PES in the Netherlands. One measure explicitly to be mentioned here is the *Employee training* (Qualifizierungsförderung für Beschäftigte), a central measure of the AMS, which helps to ensure job sustainability. In 2018, enterprises received EUR 7,6 million for the qualification of 16,694 employees (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019d).

Moreover, there are measures offered by the SMS regarding further training in connection with the Occupational assistance (*Arbeitsassistenz*) that may be worth looking at regarding its transferability to the NL but also to other EU Member States.

5 Questions

We would like to receive further information on the following particular aspects of the policy measure:

- What is the role of the municipalities within the services offered by the PES? Are the municipalities made accountable for any measures/actions? What does shared responsibility between PES and municipalities mean in practice?
- Which PwD are regarded as target group for the PES, i.e. which degree of disability is eligible for funding in PES measures?
- Why is the disability benefit (DB) so low compared to the unemployment benefit (UB)? What are the criteria for receiving UB or DB?
- Why is it more difficult to create jobs in public administration compared to jobs in the private sector (125 000 extra jobs by 2026 compared to 2013)?
- Where do you face the biggest challenge during the integration of PwD? In 1) receiving information about open posts, 2) acquiring them, 3) filling them with PwD or in 4) in cooperating with different actors in a multilevel governance matrix?
- Which outreach activities does the PES (or other actors in NL) implement to prepare for integration of PwD in the regular labour market? Does the PES proactively engage with potential employers? And if, how?

6 List of references

Interviews:

Interview 1: Interview held with Ulrike Rebhandl, Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection on 19 February 2020.

Interview 2: Interview with Andrea Reisinger and Susanne Dungal, Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, Department of Services for Enterprises on 17 February 2020.

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Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

Situation in the peer country

- Increase in labour market demand;
- Shared responsibility between AMS, SMS, Länder and others;
- Quota system;
- Employment Disability Act.

National policies and measures

- Competence centred approach followed by the AMS;
- Raising awareness of (possible) employers;
- Responding to the specific needs of PwD;
- Integration chains.

Assessment of success factors and transferability

Success factors comprise:

- To proactively inform companies about options and possibilities on time (measures, actions, funding, funding requirements, etc.);
- To generate high data quality (from firms as well as from PwD) while in parallel ensure data protection regulations (GDPR);
- To activate persons searching for a job and emphasise on the competences the individuals bring; and
- To offer grants/comprehensive support measures that enable for individual adjustments according to the needs of both, the employers and the employees.

The Broadcasting Campaign 'Ö3 apprenticeship' may be of interest to the PES in the Netherlands.

Questions

- What is the role of the municipalities within the services offered by the PES? Are the municipalities made accountable for any measures/actions? What does shared responsibility between PES and municipality mean in practice?
- Which PwD are regarded as target group for the PES, i.e. which degree of disability is eligible for funding in PES measures?
- Why is the disability benefit (DB) so low compared to the unemployment benefit (UB)? What are the criteria for receiving UB or DB?
- Why is it more difficult to create jobs in public administration compared to jobs in the private sector (125 000 extra jobs by 2026 compared to 2013)?
- Where do you face the biggest challenge during the integration of PwD? In 1) receiving information about open posts, 2) acquiring them, 3) filling them with PwD or in 4) in cooperating with different actors in a multilevel governance matrix?
- Which outreach activities does the PES (or other actors in NL) implement to prepare for integration of PwD in the regular labour market? Does the PES proactively engage with potential employers? And if, how?

Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	Broadcasting campaign 'Ö3 apprenticeship' (Ö3 Lehrstellenaktion)
Year of implementation:	2019
Coordinating authority:	Austrian Broadcasting Radio Austria 3 (Ö3)
Objectives:	To raise awareness on demands for jobs for PwD, especially young people in order to find enterprises for apprenticeships.
Main activities:	Both employers and young people were interviewed during broadcasting events. They jointly informed about their experiences. The events have been implemented by the Austrian Broadcasting Radio Austria 3 (Ö3) which has the largest reach of all radios in Austria. It was implemented together by the SMS, the AMS and <i>dabei Austria</i> , a project promoter, during May 2019. The aim was to showcase chances for both PwD searching for a job and employers when being matched. The role of the AMS was to find persons interested and enterprises fitting to the demands.
Results so far:	In the course of this campaign, 122 young PwD have been supported by the AMS (66% male and 34% female; Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, 2019c). The majority of them has already been in contact with the AMS or partner organisations before. After 6 months, 57 young people have still been registered unemployed, while 65 youth were not any more registered unemployed. Of those not any more registered, 25 have found an apprenticeship place or work; 10 have continued with the school and 2 were reported ill. The events had a very good reach and enabled to minimize the "negative" (deficit oriented) view on employment for PwD in enterprises and the general public.

