

BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS IN THE PROFESSIONAL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES IN BUCHAREST

Carmen Ileana Dobrescu, Darius-Stefan Nestoriuc, Camelia Teodorescu, Florin Alin Butoi, Ana-Irina Lequeux-Dinca

Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest, Romania

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Abstract This study aims to examine in detail the real and complex obstacles faced by people with physical disabilities when seeking employment, but also after employment, as well as their daily activities in an organized environment. In order to understand these difficulties from their perspective, the barriers they encounter and which must be overcome must be examined, presenting a realistic picture of the situation. The results should serve as a basis for developing concrete recommendations to employers, public institutions, and decision-makers with the aim of promoting inclusive policies, removing stereotypes, and creating a fair professional landscape for all. The study has four objectives: to classify barriers to recruitment and employment (subjective factors: employer attitudes and fear of discrimination; objective factors: physical accessibility and application procedures), identifying everyday obstacles in the workplace (infrastructural and technological accessibility, social dynamics), correlating and systematizing the solutions proposed by people with disabilities, and effectively disseminating the findings to facilitate the implementation of change. The methodology is qualitative, based on structured technological interviews with open-ended questions. The data will be analyzed through synthesis to encourage participants to share their personal experiences and propose detailed suggestions.

Key words: specific barriers, employment, disabilities, physical accessibility, equity, inclusive policies

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to highlight the employment experiences of people with physical disabilities and the barriers they face in integrating into the labor market, as well as to promote solutions proposed by community members themselves (Daniel et al., 2025; Nevala et al., 2014). Disability is a complex phenomenon, shaped by the social environment, which any person may acquire during their lifetime (Kehayia et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2020). Disabilities can be sensory, motor, intellectual (communication and learning deficits), and mental (impairment of cognitive functions). (National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2023). Under national and international law, people with disabilities have the following recognized rights: equality before the law; the guarantee of adequate living conditions that ensure their independence; equal access to education; access to high-quality health services; equal participation in social life; and the right to work based on competence in order to achieve financial independence. (Ministry of Investments and European Projects, 2020). There are international legal institutions that defend the rights of people with disabilities, including the UN General Assembly and the Council of Europe. As a member of these organizations, Romania adheres to the aforementioned policies. In 1990, the State Secretariat for People with Disabilities was established. The Romanian Constitution dedicates a separate article to people with disabilities. In 1992, Law No. 53 on the special protection of persons with disabilities and Law No. 57 on the employment of persons with disabilities were enacted. An important milestone was marked by the entry into force of the National Strategy for the Protection, Integration, and Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities for 2006–2013 and Law No. 448/2006 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. At the national level, the National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2022–2027 was approved on April 15, 2022. The strategy implements the provisions of the UN Convention and aims to ensure their enforcement. (National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2023). At the local level, Bucharest develops local policies based on national strategies through specific documents: the Strategy for the Development of Social Services in the Municipality of Bucharest 2023–2030; the Annual Action Plan of the DGASMB; and the National Strategy “A Fair Romania” 2022–2027.

Methodology

In conducting this study, we employed a mixed-methods approach, specifically using interviews and visual analysis (represented through word clouds). Through structured interviews, we collected information regarding the job search experience, the difficulties encountered, and the aspirations of people with disabilities, identifying common issues by disability category as well as those faced by

employers. Respondents were contacted via online platforms such as Zoom and Teams, with the help of social media, associations, and NGOs. Following the interviews, certain keywords representative of the experiences of people with disabilities in the workplace and during job interviews were selected from interactions with coworkers and employers. These discussions with respondents helped shed light on the barriers they face in their professional lives and when choosing a job, and the way employers behave (whether they value their qualities and skills without regard to disability, or discriminate against them by refusing to hire them out of fear of reduced productivity and additional costs) can determine whether people with disabilities are hired or not.

Results and Discussion

Enablers and Barriers to the Entry of People with Disabilities into the Labor Market

In Romania, employment for people with disabilities is a priority. In reality, however, they face a number of barriers to employment, resulting in an employment rate for people with disabilities that is much lower than that of the general population. The right to a job is very important for the lives of people with disabilities; it is essential that the job be freely chosen and reflect their training and personal skills. The main factor influencing their employment is education. The educational system in Romania creates a number of disadvantages due to the number of children who are not enrolled in school or who drop out early, especially in rural areas.

A frequently cited reason why they cannot secure a job is health issues, such as the need for sick leave or time off to visit the hospital, as well as tardiness or absences. Their qualifications often differ from the official requirements of certain jobs. Employment provides people with disabilities with financial independence, helping them improve their quality of life, achieve social inclusion, and gain professional recognition. In addition to personal financial benefits, participation in economic activities contributes to increased public revenue. Other significant barriers to the professional inclusion of people with disabilities include deficiencies in transportation infrastructure, which affect their physical mobility to the workplace, the absence or limitation of workplace accommodations, and attitudinal barriers from coworkers. The process of guiding people with disabilities toward the labor market reveals a disconnect between their professional profiles and market demands, due to the disregard of individual skills and aspirations. It is necessary to develop specialized career guidance programs based on a unified methodology for assessing individual competencies, with this task being handled by multiple agencies, departments, and ministries.

The process for people with disabilities to find employment

To find employment, people with disabilities should contact an employment agency. The focus is on enabling people with disabilities to be active in society and in the workplace, with the goal of ensuring they are not excluded from society but rather encouraged to participate in economic and social life. At the same time, society helps them build self-esteem, reduce dependence, maintain good health, enjoy a longer life expectancy, and foster social relationships (Lindsay et al., 2021). The law on the protection and promotion of their rights recognizes the right to work and earn an income in accordance with labor legislation and to create all the necessary conditions for them to choose and practice their profession. Any person with a disability who is employed is an asset to society and to the community to which they belong. A person with a disability can hold any type of job if they are in the right environment, where they can be productive. Employment opportunities are generally identified through job postings or through NGOs, a suitable example being Motivation Romania. However, the information process faces obstacles, as the posted announcements lack clarity and appeal. There is also an inconsistency between the initial requirements and the duties ultimately assigned, compounded by an omission of employee benefits and perks. These challenges are compounded by a lack of accommodations for people with disabilities and the emergence of forms of discrimination. To promote employment opportunities in the public and private sectors, institutions with at least 50 employees must hire a number of people with disabilities representing at least 4% of the total workforce. Employers who fail to meet the employment quota have two compensatory options: paying a monthly amount equal to 50% of the national minimum gross base salary multiplied by the number of unfilled positions for people with disabilities, or directing these funds toward the purchase of products or services from authorized entities where people with disabilities are employed. The state facilitates the integration of people with disabilities through various tax and financial incentives for employers, including the deductibility of expenses when calculating taxable income, subsidies for the costs of workplace adaptations, and the purchase of assistive equipment or accessibility technologies (Cun, 2014). In the case of home-based work, the costs of transporting raw materials and finished products from the workplace to the home and vice versa are covered. (Law No. 448 of December 6,

2006) Employers receive financial assistance for training and career guidance programs to retain human capital in the labor market.

Employment of people with physical disabilities in the labor market



Fig. 1: Initial Professional Context



Fig. 2: The Hiring Process and Initial Perceptions

In the first section of the interview, based on the responses collected, the interviewed people with disabilities who had higher education obtained their first job between the ages of 18 and 30. Most respondents mentioned that their preferred fields were jewelry making, crafts, and unique arts within the industry, as well as IT and front-office roles (fig. 1 and fig. 2). Additionally, most found these job opportunities through online job postings or newspaper ads.

In the second section of the interviews, respondents mentioned that discussions about their disability are avoided; instead, they are asked about their skills—specifically, that they are expected to be focused, concentrated, serious, and dedicated to their work. Most said they have an accessible workplace, which usually refers to their workstation and the technologies used for work.



Fig 3: Work Experience and Adaptation



Fig. 4: Obstacles and Solutions

In the third section (fig. 3), most respondents with a college education adapt easily, depending on their job, and have opportunities for career advancement; they are satisfied with their work schedule as well as with the equipment at their workplace. However, there are also people who have a harder time adapting, requiring special equipment and a somewhat flexible schedule.

In the fourth section, most respondents said they prefer physical obstacles, which they often find easier than those involving people (fig. 4). They also need support in the form of: the possibility of a flexible schedule, a potential health insurance plan, or simply through communication, understanding, and teamwork from their coworkers.



Fig. 5: Opinions and Recommendations

In the fifth section (fig. 5), the interviewees primarily request attention, acceptance, and patience in the workplace, financial incentives and tax exemptions, the creation of more jobs, reimbursement for other types of transportation in special cases, on-the-job training, and monitoring of professional performance.

Conclusions

Expectations in the workplace refer to the roles that people with disabilities consider realistic. They often face challenges related to these expectations, managing their condition, self-advocacy, and support. On a social level, people with disabilities face challenges related to workplace accessibility, transportation, and stigma, and are concerned about employers' lack of trust, lower wages, and physical access to the workplace. The communities they belong to must demonstrate greater understanding, better communication, and a spirit of teamwork. Job postings need to meet certain standards so that they become more transparent and explicitly include principles of equity. In this regard, there should be a rigorous alignment of requirements related to physical abilities with job duties, avoiding unjustified selection barriers. At the same time, the role of educational institutions in providing tailored vocational training must be strengthened. Greater attention to people with disabilities would facilitate an effective transition from school to the labor market, ensuring their inclusion in society.

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Souhrn

Článek se zabývá náročným procesem přijímání osob se zdravotním postižením do zaměstnání. Popisuje průběh tohoto procesu a míru jeho přístupnosti, stejně jako řešení navrhovaná některými osobami se zdravotním postižením a určitými nevládními organizacemi s cílem usnadnit těmto lidem přístup k zaměstnání, a tím i k normálnímu životu. Tyto iniciativy se neustále vyvíjejí a podporují integraci těchto osob do dnešní společnosti.

Contact:

Carmen Ileana Dobrescu

E-mail: carmen.dobrescu@s.unibuc.ro

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