



“A WORKPLACE WITH ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS”
SPECIAL GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYERS

A practical Handbook for blind and visually impaired work placement

Intellectual Output N.2



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Introduction

The RADAR project started in December 2019, and, like any project, it is based on the starting situation and the most suitable solution hypotheses. The COVID19 affair has profoundly altered the starting data, but despite this we believe that the information we have collected, the guidelines that have emerged, and above all the plan for "sharing" before, "disseminating the results" are still relevant, and, we would dare to say, all the more so, precisely because the meetings we had with the various interlocutors gave us the opportunity to clarify for our own benefit facts, critical points, trends and opportunities, which, in our opinion, will hopefully be of help and support to face the new challenges with greater awareness and with better chances of success.

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Premise

The main goal of this practical handbook is to provide employers and entrepreneurial actors some key info, suggestions and concrete examples that can be helpful for the effective work placement of blind and partially sighted people. The contents here included – indeed - aim to explore the main issues connected to the employability of visually impaired people and they are treated focusing the employer’s point of view, underlining that accessibility is not to be considered a synonymous of business cost, but it can be a real and profitable resource.

The Guidelines treat contents such as the accessibility (and social inclusion) in the work-place, what does it mean and what it entails for the optimal and more profitable working conditions of visually impaired workers, not only from the strictly operational, but also from the relational and humane one. In particular, this handbook provides the employer with general useful info about blindness and low vision and proposes suggestions on how to approach the different needs of blind or VIP workers. Also, the several professional tasks that could be covered by blind and/or partially sighted workers thanks to adequate assistive ICTs for the specific business requirements are presented too. Finally, the handbook includes also an overview for each involved country (Austria, Italy, Netherlands, Poland) on the main legislative aspects concerning possible duties and benefits in hiring of this peculiar category of workers

More in general, with these Guidelines, the RADAR project partners wish to contribute to raise the awareness around the employability of visually impaired people, to foster the relevance of social inclusion within the business process and to develop and spread the culture of accessibility in a workplace.

The Guidelines are structured in 5 parts:

1) PART I – INSPIRATIONAL SUCCESS STORIES OF EMPLOYERS

To provide readers with some profitable experiences concretely carried out by employers and employees on the ground of accessibility and social inclusion within the work place;

2) PART II – A GENERAL INTRODUCTION, *the possibilities of employability for blind or visually impaired employees*

To introduce the key knowledge and concepts related to the employability of blind and visually impaired people that could support employers in dealing with this category of workers;

3) PART III – AN ACCESSIBLE WORKPLACE, *adjustments in the workplace and supporting ICT*

To offer insights on what "assistive technology" is and what should be considered a “work place with accessibility requirements”;

4) PART IV – INCLUSIVE HIRING

To propose food for thought around a peculiar theme such as that of “inclusive hiring”;

5) PART V - LEGISLATION & SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

To highlight the main references to national legislation and information about supporting organizations.



The Guidelines are complemented by an **operational Annex**, borrowed as good practice within the work accessibility area from the Dutch business organization. The Annex is composed by a template check list - aimed to assess whether the possible work assignment or tasks within a business are suitable/proposable or can be performed by an employee with a visual impairment - and a tailored road-map. The road-map provides several functional suggestions on how specific issues such as mobility within the internal or external work spaces, possible workstation's adjustments, tasks' organization, communication and support, could be effectively managed in a company.

Therefore, both the proposed tools are characterized by useful suggestions easily applicable and consultable by the employers as valid and practical example. The main aim of the Annex - indeed - is stimulating the reader in reflecting (and adapting) the proposed issues to his/her own business, attracting their interest and sensitizing them around the concrete aspects linked to the accessibility of work-place and work inclusion of blind and visually impaired.

By using the Guidelines, it should be easier for you as an employer to deal with or hire an employee who is blind or visually impaired and so to facilitate him / her during the employability. This enables the blind or visually impaired employee to participate in the regular employment process and social inclusion.

Input for this manual came from the whole the RADAR project including both: the first survey phase - constituted by a desktop study on the employability of the blind and VIP and by a field-research involving employers with and without experience in hiring blind or visually impaired employees¹ - and the preparation phase to the Guidelines' drafting. Within this preliminary phase, local entrepreneurial actors in each country coming from different economic sectors and companies gave their support in discussing the main contents to be included in this handbook, providing suggestions and highlighting their specific needs (of knowledge, competences, etc.) regarding employability of blind and visually impaired people.

¹ All the results achieved by the research are included in the **I.O1 TEAF – Training, Employability, Accessibility Framework**, a general comparison framework of VIP work placement and social inclusion procedures in partner countries (Austria, Italy, Netherlands, Poland).



PART I – INSPIRATIONAL SUCCESS STORIES OF EMPLOYERS

As an employer it can be challenging to hire a blind or VIP employee. The first time you do not know what is necessary to make sure the employee can function and is accepted by the other employees (social inclusion).

The following examples are success stories which came forward during the RADAR project, from interviews and experiences of the researchers, collected in each partner country.

In ITALY there are some case studies conducted to experiment new opportunities for the VIP at work.

- A success story, **the case of the Institute for the Blind Foundation in Milan**, which led to the hiring of six blind persons in two worldwide companies.

An interesting experience has been recently conducted by the Institute for the Blind Foundation in Milan which has a very long experience in the field of early education, special support to schools and families, designing and realization of special learning aids for the blind and, more recently, vocational training and promotion of job opportunities.

The specific experience conducted by the Institute for the Blind Foundation (2019-2021) has led to the main outcome concretized into the hiring of 6 visually impaired persons in two worldwide companies, namely ALER and DHL. The experiment framework based on some crucial aspects: 1) Decay of traditional jobs (mainly switchboard operator); 2) new opportunities coming from appropriate use of digital resources (HW SW & adaptive / assistive technologies); 3) Team work and Direct involvement of all stakeholders, and not only by users and their organizations / associations. In summary, some useful and strong points emerged from the project: 1) co-designment - that is sharing a project from its very beginning between users (VIPs and their organizations), potential employers; sharing means taking on board strong points, possible risks and critical points, being available to change some old habits and views about visual disability and visual impaired persons. 2) External opportunities - in our case specific competition announcements issued by regional Authorities, and financial resources aiming at new job opportunities. 3) Hands-on experience. During the training the Foundation organized several events, both at the vocational center and at the two companies' workplace; students had the opportunity to make live experience of the practical work. 4) Internships and stages.

Result of the project is that 6 blind persons have been hired and now work as operators in customer care services. From this experience we can conclude that best praxis may expose us to the risk of assuming that all we to do is a mechanical transferring of the successful experience. Far from this, we have to analyse the framework, strong and weak points, threats and opportunities, keeping in mind that even the best experience might be an unique event, which we can use as a guideline, a sort of road map, which must be adapted to each specific situation.

(For further details, see the article: <http://www.superando.it/2021/06/16/sei-assunzioni-di-persone-con-disabilita-visiva-caso-o-perseveranza/>)



“Sei assunzioni di persone con disabilità visiva: caso o perseveranza?”

by: Franco Lisi, Managing Director of *Institute for the Blind Foundation in Milan, Scientific Area*; Ivana Cavallini and Francesco Cusati, Labor Services operators of *Institute for the Blind Foundation in Milan* (16 Giugno 2021).

- A success story, **the case of Bank of Italy**, in which a group of VIP have been hired for specific (accessible) functions based on ICT.

The Bank of Italy has always hired people with visual impairments both through dedicated and non-dedicated competitions. Most of these work as telephone switchboard operators; the exception is a small group of colleagues, who since the competition launched in 2008 have been hired as Assistants in some branches. So, thanks to an Italian law on the targeted hiring of people with disabilities (Law 68 of 12 March 1999), the Bank of Italy has hired a group of blind people to perform the duties in the role of the vice assistant for various branches. The activities carried out by the Institution together with blind people and sighted colleagues were intended to search for tasks other than those traditionally intended for blind and visually impaired people and to consider very deeply the different aspects of work placement in order to guarantee their dignity and effectiveness. From the beginning, the Bank institution has been actively committed, thanks also to the spontaneous availability of all the employees, to identify and address the main difficulties of a logistical, procedural, organizational and training nature, also proceeding, compatibly with the obstacles due to the lack of accessibility of the Bank's IT procedures, to define possible areas of work use.

In particular, with reference to the problems of inclusion, the main tasks included: Set up suitable workplaces (e.g., Braille display and screen reading or magnifier software, and positioned in sufficiently quiet points to allow the use of voice synthesizer and suitable for hosting guide dogs); Update the emergency plan, increasing the number of employees able to provide assistance in the event of evacuation; Accompany colleagues on several occasions in the various premises of the offices; Organize the use of the canteen; Set up an external Braille push-button panel and a speech synthesis system at the elevator; Install "talking" badge readers; Install "talking" ATMs.

The experience has led to the definition of a practical procedure that can suggest important aspects that employers should take into consideration when hiring people with vision impairments. These include: 1) Targeted training for VIP; 2) training for the sighted employees to introduce the VIP colleagues; 3) Principles of the universal design.

As for the **NETHERLANDS** we can examine an example of visually impaired employee working as a furniture maker.

Tim Sieders (22) is visually impaired and trained as an interior builder. Since February he works as a furniture maker in Den Hoorn (place in Holland). Tim is guided by a jobcoach of Werkpad, specialised job-coaches of Bartiméus. Things are going so well, his contract was extended in September. ‘For me it’s important to listen carefully to my eyes: what am I able to do in a day.’



Tim enthusiastically tells about his experiences so far. 'After I became visually impaired at the age of 13, my parents started looking for help and called in Bartimeus. Because of this I got an outpatient counselor through Bartiméus at highschool and vocational education. They guided me throughout the school period.'

● **Wood Furniture College**

'I initially wanted to become a plasterer. At school they offered me a lot of woodworking. Especially interior construction appealed to me, because I find it more varied than production work. Subsequently, I obtained my construction diploma, first basic level, then professional level at the Wood Furniture College.'

● **Subsidy for the employer**

'With the help of my employment consultant at Werkpad, I then contacted various companies. At one of the companies. I was allowed to work for 4 months on a trial basis. This went well at both sides. Then we looked at the possibilities together with the municipality. With subsidy, I now have a six-month contract.'

● **Perseverance**

'Because of Tim's enthusiasm and perseverance, we wanted to offer him a contract', says Tim's employer Nils Algera, director van Wens interior. 'Tim is great guy to work with. There are certain activities that he can't perform because of his disability. In other activities he may need more guidance than a sighted employee. But that is not always necessary.'

● **Checking my self**

With regard to modifications, it was examined how the workspace can be set up as safely as possible, especially at the machines. Tim has made a mark round the machines. It helps him not to run into them. Tim: 'I notice that I don't work very fast, because I always check my work with the help of my magnifying glasses. With this tool everything is magnified, I can see better and my hands are free to work.'

● **Listen to my eyes**

'It's important to listen well to my eyes: they tell me what I am able to do at a day. I also have to indicate on time when things are no longer working. Then I take a short break or I put on my sunglasses. The sunglasses help my eyes to rest.'

'When anyone asks why I wear such weird glasses, I simply explain'

● **Cooperation**

'The cooperation with colleagues is going well. Sometimes I still find it difficult to tell people I hardly know that I'm partially sighted. But it's getting easier.'

'I have been working here for six months now and I like it a lot. It's such a great feeling when you've made something in the work place and you see it completely finished at a location.'



As for **POLAND**, we can examine a case of one partially sighted graduate, Damian. Damian is at present 28 years old, he has a severe degree of visual impairment.

Damian studied at the Warsaw's University, at the Faculty of the European Studies. When he was a student of the last two years, he took part in a few projects, the aim of which was to prepare the participants to enter the job market.

He had some consultations with the job advisor, he took part in the workshops where he could learn the methods of looking for a first job.

He took part as well in some IT trainings, such as excel for professionals and in a training how to write a blog.

He was offered a 3-months-paid-internship in the Communication department of the Polish Association of the Blind – it was in the framework of the EU funded project.

After this internship and after he has accomplished his studies at the Warsaw University, with the Master of Arts degree, he started to look for a job. He used “classic methods” as well as the new technologies to look for the job – he knew how to do it thanks to the trainings he had undergone in the framework of different projects. He was still unsuccessful. The majority of employers did not react to his applications sent out in big numbers.

Finally, a company interested in employing a visually impaired person to work in their presentation room, where they exposed their product – an innovative multi use tool for the disabled persons – a so called multi use electronic speaker, managed by voice, contacted the Polish Association of the Blind.

Damian, known in the Association and to its specialists (in the employment field included) was the one recommended for the employment.

Everything went very well till the pandemic of the coronavirus started to spread. At this moment, the presentation room was closed and Damian had lost his job – it was the first “real” job in his life.

Damian started to look for the job again, using all the possible methods. He knew, that because of the pandemic it could be even more difficult to find a job at this given moment.

At this time, another company interested in hiring visually impaired persons contacted the Polish Association of the Blind. This time they looked for the people, who would work in a distant way. They were interested in finding someone, who could write articles, texts, who could analyse certain text, related mostly to the human resources area.

Damian, known in the Association and being considered someone with good communication skills, perseverant, nice personality was the one to be proposed for this job.

It was a really good match – Damian still works for this company, he likes his job, he is happy that he can work from his home. He has now a job contract for 3 years.

The employer appreciates his work and the contact with him. As for now, everything goes smoothly and with the satisfaction on the employee and on the employer side.



*Workplace adaptations for the blind as a business service- AUSTRIA/VIDEBIS -Work place adaptation an **AUSTRIAN** experience promoting the workplace accessibility²*

Videbis GmbH³ is an Austrian organization founded in 2000. This organisation provides software solutions, products, and visual aids for people who are blind or have impaired vision. They provide software and hardware solutions for the companies. These solutions help companies to make their workplaces more accessible to their employees, and job searchers can find job based on their relevant skills. Videbis has equipped 1,082 workplaces for people with visual impairment between 2016 and 2019.

- **Problem Addressed**

Due to a shortage of accessible equipment in the workplace, people with visual impairments in Austria have trouble in getting and/or sustaining jobs.

- **Problem solution with innovation, and its impact**

Videbis has diverse group of professionals, including software technicians, braille system specialists, and specialized opticians. These experts collaborate with client to find the finest solutions for them. They also help in discovering the most cost-effective financing options for the gadgets, as well as providing the option to rent equipment.

The client undergoes training to utilize the hardware or software depending on the intervention and solution at Videbis headquarters. The different variety of products includes electronic aids, barrier-free lighting, software adaptation, and suitable work glasses, among others. In the year 2020, Videbis have nine employees who are blind or have limited eyesight. They participate in the development of the company's solutions, allowing them to use on their own experiences with assistive technology.

Videbis adapted roughly 350 businesses every year between 2016 to 2019. Additionally, they have assisted over 2,000 people with disabilities in their workplace.

- **Outlook, transferability, and Sales**

Videbis produced over €2.2 million in sales from its workplace equipment in 2018 and 2019. The company has expanded its operations to include offices in Vienna, Linz, Graz, and Innsbruck. In 2019, the company moved to new premises, which include a showroom where customers may try out equipment as well as Seminar facilities. Videbis follows the recent trends in ICT advancements. Moreover, their employees frequently adapt the appropriate software to the visually impaired/blind user's individual needs. In addition, the company provides accessibility advice to some software manufacturer. Videbis intends to keep existing jobs for the blind and visually impaired while also creating new opportunities for the youth.

² For further details consult: **Zero Project Report 2021, Employment and ICT Zero Project Report 2021, 82 Innovative Practices and Policies from 46 countries, Impact-Transfer and #ZeroCon21 International study on innovations supporting the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Zero Project – For a world with zero barriers, AUSTRIA/VIDEBIS – WORKPLACE ADAPTATION, pg. 26.**

<https://zeroproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021-Zero-Project-Report-Employment-accessible.pdf>

³ Videbis Website: www.videbis.at

EU PROGRAMME ERASMUS+ VET KA2 Strategic Partnerships

Project RADAR

Vocational Guidance and Employability for Blind and Partially Sighted People

Code 2019-1-IT01-KA202-007396 - CUP G15G19000150006



Tips for communicating with a blind or VIP colleague

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/employers-and-businesses/employing-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/personel-and-training/communicating-colleague>

Link to check information about visual impairment and sight loss

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/employers-and-businesses/employing-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/personel-and-training/some-facts-about-sight-loss>

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Link to employment case-studies

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/employers-and-businesses/employing-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/employment-case-studies>

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/employers-and-businesses/employing-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/making-your-workplace-accessible/>

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/employers-and-businesses/employing-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/making-your-workplace-accessible/risk-assessments>



PART II – GENERAL INTRODUCTION,

Possibilities of employability for blind or VIP employees

The Part II is opened by a brief excursus on the RADAR project, describing its main purposes and realized activities to let the reader know the development process that led to the contents he/she finds in the Guidelines.

This section is also aimed to introduce the key knowledge and concepts related to the employability of blind and visually impaired people that could support the employers - and the entrepreneurial actors of different kinds – in order to deal with this category of workers. It contains general information about blindness and low vision and provides suggestions on how to approach the different needs of blind or VIP workers also disclosing the several professional tasks coverable by them, thanks to adequate assistive ICTs for the specific business requirements. In few years the ICT evolution has enlarged the working assignments potentially accomplished by VIP: they are no longer limited to general secretary assignments as telephone operators and masseurs, but they can extend, for example, even to managerial, administrative and accounting tasks or to specific professional profiles connected with ICT accessibility.

II.1) RADAR PROJECT: GOALS, ACTIVITIES AND PURPOSES FOR SOCIAL AND WORKING INCLUSION OF BLIND AND VI WORKERS

In Europe, the unemployment rate of blind or visually impaired people (VIP) remains high, despite the significant progress that has been made both from the legislative point of view and from that of new professional opportunities offered by advanced assistive ICTs for work. The reason for these limited improvements depends on several factors:

- EU countries have different definitions of “disability” and “blindness & visual impairment”, different types of social security systems, employment regulations and economic situations. These differences make free circulation in EU Labor Market difficult for disabled workers.
- Lack or fragmentary information, not homogeneously widespread among EU countries, about new professional or training opportunities for VIP due to the last assistive ICTs. These opportunities are known and adopted at different levels in workplaces.

RADAR project aims to tackle the difficult issues related to unemployment rates of blind and VIP in EU, contributing to fill the lack of information about new opportunities provided by the Labor market for them and improving the knowledge on current training chances linked to accessibility systems in use and new employment areas. To achieve these goals, the project intends to intervene directly on 2 of the main actors engaged with the approaching and work-placing process for VIP in the Labor Market: employers and operators in charge of employment and of job-application services (e.g. Labor Services Operators such as career guidance professionals, mentors, etc.), both in private or public offices for work & VET inclusion policies.

The specific actions provided by the RADAR project, in fact, are aimed to:



1. Make Employers more aware about VIP employability issues, showing working tasks and professional roles which could be covered by them and giving information about standards/technological requirements necessary for their optimal working conditions.
2. Enhance the quality of VET Guidance Services & Work-Placement for blind and partially sighted jobseekers, improving the sectoral competencies of their related operators. They will gain more deep knowledge about new learning opportunities and emerging professions coverable also by VIP thanks to the continuous development/diffusion of ICTs for accessibility and support. Thanks to the large use of these ICTs, indeed, the traditional range of VIP employment can be widened to working roles or tasks considered not accessible until today.
3. Improve the competencies of trainers, educators, teachers, support teachers and tutors for better managing specific training and working needs of VIP.
4. Create a package of peculiar competencies for employers, guidance professionals, Labor Services operators, trainers and educators that could be an innovative reference to train/prepare them to effectively deal with blind and VIP needs.

In order to reach these goals, RADAR project produced three main products (Intellectual Outputs), among those there are the Guidelines you're reading. The three project's outputs - indeed - consist in:

1. **TRAINING-EMPLOYABILITY-ACCESSIBILITY FRAMEWORK (TEAF):** general comparison framework of VIP work placement and social inclusion procedures, describing –for each involved country- weaknesses, strengths and development lines of accessibility and VET Services through a detailed study of Employers and Labor Services Operators peculiar needs and the more requested professional profiles (or competences) coverable also by blind and VI jobseekers with the last assistive ICTs;
2. **SPECIAL GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYERS:** targeted lines about new roles and working tasks potentially coverable by VIP using last assistive ICTs. These Guidelines are aimed to provide employers and entrepreneurial actors key info for the effective work placement of blind and partially sighted people so as to foster the relevance of social inclusion within the business process and to develop and spread the culture of accessibility in a workplace. They also include an overview on specific technological assistive requirements to make the workplace accessible - that can be considered not only synonymous with business cost - and on possible duties and benefits in hiring.
3. **OPERATIVE GUIDELINES FOR VET AND CAREER GUIDANCE OPERATORS** – highly operational lines for employment and job-application services operators to be aware of the most adequate strategies to approach/manage the peculiar needs of VI jobseekers, knowing the currently available training opportunities (e.g. training courses, internships, etc.) and innovative elements for their effective work placement. According to their contents, these Guidelines are useful also for families, teachers, support teachers and educators as they play a key role, especially for the youngest or newly blind and partially sighted persons.



The RADAR's outputs are all strictly linked to each other since they have been developed in a logical sequence: the first one was the TEAF. Thanks to the preliminary research phase aimed to build the common reference Framework it was possible to collect general data on different approaches and best practices in use for the work-placement of blind and VIP as well as to compare the various job-application dynamics for this category coming from each partner country. Also, the Framework gave partners the opportunity to compare the professional profiles currently covered (or potentially coverable) by VIP in their countries, laying the foundations for possible interesting and fruitful transfer of know-how in this area.

At the same time, within the researching activities done for the TEAF, the peculiar needs of Employers and Labor Services Operators dealing with blind/VI workers have been deepened, highlighting interesting food for thought useful to develop both the Guidelines. The two Guidelines - indeed - have been designed starting, recalling and expanding the info provided by the TEAF but deepening the key aspects according to their own specific target. If that for Employers are mainly aimed to spread the culture of accessibility in the workplace and to break down the possible prejudice in hiring blind or VI workers, that for Labor Services Operators are aimed to raise the awareness of their recipients about the issues on vocational guidance and employability for visually impaired people, providing operators a practical support to carry out their working assignments and daily commitments. According to their fundamental aims and operational goals, the two Guidelines represent the core outputs of the whole RADAR and they have been structured in very practical and useful handbooks easily consultable and readable by their final users.

II. 2) THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED WORKER

The expression “Visual impairment” includes a variety of physical / psychological conditions which deserve specific attention. For example, blind does not necessarily mean that a person has no sight at all. They may have some useful sight. This implies that some adaptations to the workplace can simply be to contrast on documents, change font sizes, computer monitors, and keyboards. Visual loss can be measured in various ways. Some instances include: the rate of focus, distance vision, night blindness, tunnel vision, sensitivity to light, diffused central vision (the opposite of tunnel vision), the ability to recognize distance or speed, and the ability to see contrast.

Blind and visually impaired people (VIP) work successfully in many sectors. The acquired can-do attitude and problem-solving skills of Blind and VIP help them to deal with their disability and make them determined employees who face every challenge with their creative thinking. Blind and VIP are ready for an opportunity to be offered and are reliable employees who have less likely left their job for another job as compared to other employees. Therefore, they provide stability to the work environment. They can use specialized tools and techniques to complete their work. Many occupations can be modified to fit an employee with low vision or blindness. They are successful across a wide variety of occupations in nearly all sectors of employment. Apart from occupations like piloting an airplane or driving a motorcycle, Blind and VIP can do different jobs like teachers, journalists, scientists, stockbrokers, web designers and office workers. Blind and VIP



employees need the right tools to do their jobs that help them to accomplish their tasks with low or without vision. Thanks to advances in technology, people with vision loss can do various things such as browse the internet, write/edit documents, send, and receive emails. Additionally, technology helps Blind and VIP to overcome accessibility barriers to accomplish their tasks.

When the workplace for a blind or VIP employee is made accessible and well organized there are no relevant differences between the blind or VIP employee and a sighted employee. So, the biggest difference would be making the workplace accessible. This also is what an employer can expect regarding possibilities, knowledge and skills of a blind or VIP employee.

II. 3) GENERAL OVERVIEW ON VIP EMPLOYABILITY BETWEEN OLD BARRIERS AND IMPROVEMENT LEARNINGS: AN INNOVATIVE PERSPECTIVE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Exploring the several issues connected to the wide theme of the work placement of blind and/or visually impaired people emerged how it can be still conditioned by many different factors due to external or internal conditions both of the business process and daily life in companies. Despite it, the fast technological evolution and the changes occurring in the Labor Market disclosed several new professional tasks coverable also by blind and visually impaired workers, thanks to adequate assistive ICTs for the specific business requirements. In few years the ICT evolution has enlarged the working assignments potentially accomplished by visually impaired: these are no longer limited to general secretary assignments as telephone operators, but they could extend, for example, even to managerial and administrative tasks or to specific roles directly connected with ICT work accessibility (e.g. Chief Accessibility Officer, Web Accessibility Tester, Web Accessibility Auditor, Web Accessibility Consultant). Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic caused an important acceleration in the digitalization of work through the extensive and massive use of smart-working and it opened additional opportunities for the employability of blind and visually impaired people, if suitably accompanied by the proper adjustment of the technological assets and by the related upgrading of competences through a tailored training both of the sighted and blind personnel.

Here below is presented a general short and operational overview on the most recurring barriers within the business process detected among the entrepreneurial actors who took part to the preliminary research phase carried out within the RADAR project, exploring the issues regarding VIP employability (For more details, it is possible to consult the research called “*Training Employability and Accessibility Framework – TEAF*” produced as first *Intellectual Output* within the RADAR project⁴).

⁴ IT VERSION of TEAF: <https://training-agency.centromachiavelli.it/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/IO1%20TEAF%20VERSIONE%20DRAFT%20 IT.pdf>
DE VERSION of TEAF: <https://cloud.integriert-studieren.jku.at/index.php/s/dpiPCCoieySwqkf>
PL VERSION of TEAF: https://pzn.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/PL_IO.1-TEAF.pdf
NL VERSION of TEAF:

This brief analysis is completed by the introduction of the most important evolving leanings for the work inclusion of visually impaired.

Internal barriers

- Prejudices, deriving mainly from scarce or no familiarity with real visually impaired persons. In Italy, to a greater extent than in European Northern countries, glance and body language is much more important in interpersonal communication, especially in some clue moments: a) starting the communication; b) feedback & so-called punctuations;
- Cultural stereotypes, privileging what is "politically correct" rather than what is really useful;
- Difficulty in thinking of good user-oriented solutions, so that, for example, people generally believe that there is no difference between looking at an object from very close and touching that same object;
- Over evaluation of ICT solutions, ignoring the need for a different strategy of interaction man / machine, which is necessary for visually impaired users;
- Take for granted the knowledge of some aspects of logistics, such as knowing the location of the toilets, the canteen, the exit and the identification of key rooms; these aspects are taken for granted for those who see, but they are not for those with sight difficulties.
- When employing a blind or VIP person primary take notice of a persons qualities, second what needs are necessary to function well. This way you give them a fair chance at the labor market.

Considering the visually impaired employee from a general point of view, we have different viewpoints and different attitudes towards work in general, just like any other person. Obviously, a good education, good level of independence (mobility, personal care, body language, verbal communication), good mastery of traditional equipment (e.g. Braille), and of assistive & adaptive technologies, ability to contrast frustrations, good adjustment capability to new and sometimes uneasy situations, all those factors undoubtedly can contribute to a better level of inclusion and satisfaction both of employer and worker.

On the contrary, an attitude based on a negative vision of work in general, or difficulties in respecting social rules, or some delays in development of mental / social skills, influence negatively the work relationship.

Finally, like for any social minority, very often a positive experience of a single blind worker influences the opinion of the employer concerning all blind persons, and, let us not forget, this is true also vice versa.

External factors

- Low occupation level in a given area / period of time in general;
- Rapid and often unpredictable changes in technologies, functions and tasks. It must be considered that a visually impaired person needs some more time in order to master new contents. Once he/she gets hold of it, he or she may even perform better than his / her sighted colleagues;



- Need for permanent updating of knowledge and competences, which on turn requires specific learning / teaching strategies - e.g. accessible material, based mainly on written information, rather than exclusively or mainly on visual cues, e.g. manuals, guides and the likes);
- Availability of accessible mobility / transportation services - from home to work and vice versa;
- State and quality of technologies;
- Level of diffusion of digital connection at national level;

Evolving challenges for the work inclusion of visually impaired

Thanks to the advancement in the ICT development and the numerous technologies capable of enabling people with disabilities to use computers and mobile devices, nowadays visually-impaired people can carry out many more jobs than in the past. Assistive Technology, in fact, allows persons with disabilities to interact with numerous applications installed on a desktop or mobile platforms, or available on the net. Visually-impaired people can use a screen reader with voice / Braille output, or a screen magnifier in order to interact with a desktop or mobile application, provided that it has been developed in an accessible manner.

Accessibility principles make it possible to design and develop services and applications for everyone, including those who are constrained to interact with assistive technology. For this scope, numerous national and international accessibility guidelines are available in the literature (and on the web) to ensure that content and applications are really accessible to all.

Having workstations accessible to people with visual impairments, and using accessible (web) applications and systems mean offering them the possibility to perform a vast variety of tasks in full independence with minimum external help. It is crucial that the employer is aware of the numerous opportunities offered by assistive technologies and the principles of accessibility in order to enable the blind employee for new tasks. It can also assign numerous responsibility activities that require autonomy and determination, provided that the employee can use all the necessary technological and accessible tools.

II.4) ACCESSIBILITY TO THE WORKPLACE: A WIDE CONCEPT

When we talk about accessibility and reasonable adjustments, often employers' think of the physical. However, if we are talking about accessibility across the board, we need to think far beyond the material and towards changing the mind-sets for how and what work disabled people are given.

Organizations throw the word 'accessibility' around but what does it actually mean? A building can have a ramp, lift or escalator but does that really make it accessible? Do meeting rooms have loops and are websites written in large enough font sizes? We need to rethink what it means to be accessible. To have an accessible workplace, not just infrastructures need to change.



In short, both the employer and the employee should know that:

- The workplace must firstly be made accessible by equipping the computer with assistive technology. The choice of the most suitable assistive technology should a) be related to the job to be performed by the employee, and b) chosen by the employee. Each assistive technology (screen reader or magnifier) offers different functions and requires to learn and use many commands. In order to guarantee efficiency, it is important that the employee can use a technology, which they are already familiar with.
- The software, applications and web services which are available to all employees must be accessible through assistive technologies.
- All employees and colleagues of the worker should be made aware of the principles of accessibility and procedures suitable for making content and services accessible. For example, colleagues should be encouraged to not use paper notes but rather digital ones. This would help the visually impaired employee to be included in a large number of possible activities and duties, as colleagues can help apply and above all keep the products accessible. This allows having a full inclusion of the visually-impaired worker.
- The work station should be placed in sufficient quiet point to facilitate the listening of the screen reader voice synthesizer or the use of braille display, and to be suitable for hosting guide dogs;
- Most important adjustments will be those of the assistive ICTs. Auditory support, braille keyboards or screen enlargement are a few possible adjustments that may be required.
- The (financial) impact for an employer is depending on the support system provided by the different countries. It indicates what the (financial) impact may be for the employer (for the possibilities in your country check PART V of this Guidelines).

II.5) IN-WORK AND EXTRA-WORK ACCESSIBLE CORPORATE SPACES: A WAY TO PROMOTE SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

- Communication with a blind or VIP employee is overall not different from communication with a sighted employee. They often use their verbal communication very well, because of the lack of non-verbal communication. For a blind or VIP employee it is important the sighted employees use names when addressing to a colleague.
- To access the business premises it may be required in the first instance for the (social) inclusion of a blind or VIP employee that they are assisted by a colleague or a buddy. It is important for their independence they can access and move around the premises on their own. The buddy may be a colleague or someone from a support organization, depending on the possibilities.



II.6) GENERAL OVERVIEW ON NEW PROFESSIONAL TASKS AND ROLES COVERABLE THANKS TO ICT DEVICES WITHIN THE BUSINESS PROCESS

The ICT evolution has enlarged the working assignments potentially accomplished by blind or VIP: they are no longer limited to general secretary assignments as telephone operators, masseurs, but they can extend for example, even to managerial, administrative and accounting tasks. Because of the good listening skills blind and VIP they excel in jobs such as translator/interpreter, social worker, psychologist and even lawyer.

Naturally there are differences between blind or VIP employees. Some of them are blind from birth, others became blind or visually impaired after a disease or accident. The extent to which a person can see has an effect on the task the person can carry out.

To provide some tangible examples of the possible new professions that could be performed by blind and visually impaired people - especially thanks to the support of the latest assistive technologies and programs – we sourced some key information from the contents developed within the other core output of the RADAR project: the Guidelines for Labor Services Operators (VET and Career Guidance professionals)⁵. The following overview can contribute to give to the employer the chance to check the possible work-placement opportunities for blind and visually impaired according to his/her own core business. In approaching that issue it has to be taken into account that any task or profession which is accessible and feasible for a blind person can be proposed to the visually-impaired job seeker or the employee. In fact, except for professions in which sight plays a fundamental role, in theory the blind or visually impaired person can carry out any activity, as long as there are environmental, technological and collaborative conditions. It is therefore essential to discuss with the individual about their attitudes, interests and abilities in carrying out certain activities. The employer and the (potential) employee can also identify a profession that is not already well defined and structured for VIP, provided that the employee's skills and needs are taken into account. It is important underlining that theoretically no limits should be considered when identifying a potential profession that can be carried out by a visually impaired person. When ICT and Assistive Technology, as well as the working environment conditions, make the profession accessible and feasible, the blind person can do it.

The professions listed here below represent **just a possible example** of what a visually impaired worker can do and they have not to be considered as exhaustive but as a dynamic base constantly updated according to the renovated demands of the Labor Market and to technological evolution.

1. *Tourist front office / back office*
2. *Professional forensic transcriber*
3. *Technician of composition and musical arrangement and planning of activities and musical products (Composer-Arranger)*
4. *Responsible for carrying out telephone interviews and selling products/services within call centres*

⁵ See “IO3 Guidelines for Labor Services Operators”, Part II – *Emerging professions for VIP, Par. II.2 List of Proposed Tasks And Professions For Vip.*



5. *Information officer, accompaniment and tutoring in training and guidance and job placement courses*
6. *Customer Contact Centre Information Clerk*
7. *Telemarketing specialist / Contact Centre Salespersons*
8. *Chief Accessibility Officer*
9. *Designer (Accessibility)*
10. *Web Accessibility Tester*
11. *Web Accessibility Auditor*
12. *Web Accessibility Consultant*
13. *Host or Hostess (Angela)*
14. *HR advisor*
15. *ICT manager*
16. *Planner*
17. *Service desk employee*
18. *Social worker*
19. *Warehouse manager*
20. *Work Psychologist*



PART III – AN ACCESSIBLE WORKPLACE,

Adjustments in the workplace and supporting ICT

This Part is mainly aimed to raise employers' awareness on the standards and technological assets necessary for the optimal working conditions of VIP. It wants to make clear what "assistive technology" is and what should be considered a "work place with accessibility requirements". And that this not necessarily being synonymous for business or operative costs.

Assistive tools are all modern technological equipment developed specifically to improve personal autonomy and make more accessible computing devices or man-machine interfaces and applications designed to adapt PC, multimedia devices and other equipment, for overcoming physical or sensory barriers at work. Equipping a work place with assistive aids means make it accessible and the level of accessibility represents for blind or VIP workers an essential condition to their (social) inclusion. A well-designed working environment reduces the possible functional limitations of blind and VIP employees and helps to enhance their professional performances.

III.1) APPLICATION PROCESS: ADAPTING THE PROCESS OR NOT?

- In most cases the working process needs no adaptations, just the software or workspace needs to be adapted. The use of paper notes must be replaced with digital notes. This can be very useful for all workers who can search for specific information or reuse the contents.
- Assistive tools are all modern technological equipment developed specifically to improve personal autonomy and make more accessible computing devices or man-machine interfaces and applications designed to adapt PC, multimedia devices and other equipment, for overcoming physical or sensory barriers at work. This is true provided that the applications and web sites have been designed keeping in mind the accessibility principles.
- Equipping a work place with assistive aids means, make it accessible and the level of accessibility represented for blind or VIP workers an essential condition to their (social) inclusion.
- A well-designed working environment reduces the possible functional limitations of blind and VIP employees and helps to enhance their professional performances.
- A blind or VIP employee most of the time comes to work using public transportation. As described before it may be necessary the employee is accompanied the first couple of times, this can be done by mobility trainers or jobcoaches.



III.2) CULTURE OF ACCESSIBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE: MEANING, PURPOSES AND BUSINESS

OUTCOMES

- It helps a blind or VIP employee to be accompanied in key places and rooms by a colleague or a buddy when starting at a new job. Based on their experiences it may be necessary to adapt some things in the workplace (moving a plant, clearing a desk).
- Training and or supervising of a blind or VIP employee must be organized on the job. The person training the blind or VIP employee can be a colleague or a specialized external trainer (for the possibilities look at part V of this guideline). Supervising will be carried out by a colleague from within the company, it is possible that this person will be needing some training / education from an external professional.
- Training sighted colleagues on what are the main needs and how to interact with a blind or VIP person can widely facilitate and enhance the inclusion of the workers with vision impairments;
- Updating the emergency plan, increasing the number of employees able to provide assistance in the event of evacuation;
- Accompany colleagues on several occasions in the various premises of the offices, to improve their knowledge of the structure (with particular regard to escape routes) and increase their autonomy in case of emergency. For the same purpose, dedicated evacuation tests have been provided in which employees with visual impairments can practice reaching the meeting point on their own;
- Organize the use of the canteen. If possible, training the canteen staff to accompany employees with disabilities to the table and to bring them the tray. To support blind when it is necessary consider the possibility to rely on availability of sighted colleagues;
- Setting up an external Braille push-button panel and a speech synthesis system at the elevator systems that signals the arrival on the floor;
- Installing "talking" badge readers.

III.3) ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY: A BUSINESS RESOURCE, NOT A COST

- Economically it is of value for a company to make corporate decisions encouraging the participation of all individuals in social life. Most societies do have people with disabilities and they should all be included socially and workwise.
- The financial consequences for the company are depending on the needs of the blind or VIP employee and the possible compensations from governments or supportive organizations. In most cases the cost will be (partially) covert (for the possibilities in your country check PART V of this guideline).



III.4) HOW TO MAKE A WORKPLACE ACCESSIBLE?

- Depending on the needs of the blind or VIP employee there can be various aspects at the workplace that need to be adapted in order to make it accessible, usable and comfortable.
- The use of special lighting.
- Reorganizing the workplace to make it completely accessible
- Specialized equipment and ICTs.
- The use of contrasting colors or the use of little color at the workspace
- A sufficient quiet work place for facilitating the use of assistive technology (i.e. voice synthesizer) and hosting a guide dog.
- A work place easily reachable by the entrance and with no architectural barriers along the pathway.
- To make sure all the workers are included it will be helpful to set up rules according to the social inclusion of the blind or VIP employee (or any other employee that is disabled or otherwise not social included). This may contain the way meetings are organized or the way people communicate (using names when addressing to someone). For the social inclusion it is important to involve the sighted employees in the process of hiring, introducing and coworking a blind or VIP employee.
- All the things above can be drawn up in a plan for accessibility adjustments within the company, a coach which supports the blind or VIP employee can help to set up this plan and together with the employee describe the needs to make sure the employee can do his / her job and is socially included.
- The options regarding support from an external in the workplace when a blind or VIP employee enters the company can be found in part V of this guideline.

Tips about an accessible workplace:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/employers-and-businesses/employing-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/making-your-workplace-accessible/>

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/employers-and-businesses/employing-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/making-your-workplace-accessible/risk-assessments>



PART IV – INCLUSIVE HIRING

Inclusive hiring means employing people with all kinds of differences and disabilities who feel welcome and valued for their contributions. The employees all have the same opportunities for advancement as their co-workers.

Creating an inclusive work environment can be a challenge but will also support employees to think outside their comfort zone, make them more creative and challenge them with new thoughts and ideas. It is proven that diversity within an organization is more likely to improve the market share of the company.

In order to create a diverse workplace, it needs to be run by diverse people. An inclusive workplace culture gives each employee a unique voice and encourages them to be themselves.

But diversity shouldn't be treated as just a new box you check. When you have a team of employees with different experience levels, backgrounds, educations and disabilities you can bring a mix of different thought, opinions and ideas to the table. This can result in sticking out from your competition and create better products or services.

However, a diverse team does not happen overnight. You need to put the right processes and systems in place to create an inclusive workforce.

In order to promote the reflection on such issue as the inclusive hiring and – more in general – on the employability of blind and visually impaired people, we would like to propose to the reading employer some open key questions. These questions especially concern a specific active employment policy tool such as the internship for blind or VIP job candidates – that may constitute the first step toward an inclusive business. Internship, indeed, is essentially aimed to encourage the first work access and the mutual knowledge between employer and future possible employee.

The following open key questions - indeed - intent to work as a sort of self-reflection tool that can be useful to help the employer in reflecting on inclusive hiring and to stimulate him/her in considering the several concrete aspects and added value of an experience like the internship for the first approach to the work of blind and visually impaired job-seekers (especially of the youngest ones) as well as to check the accessibility potential of his own business.

- ***If it was possible to have a blind or VIP intern at your company, before hiring a blind or VIP employee, would this make it easier for you to have a blind or VIP person in your company?***
- ***What are the terms for an internship like this? What will you as an employer be needing (in order of guidance, specialized equipment, adapted ICTs and costs).***
- ***What do you think is a good term for an internship like this (preparation, duration)?***
- ***Do you think it will be easier for you to hire a blind or VIP employee after they have been an intern successfully?***





PART V – LEGISLATION & SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

The last part constitutes a useful appendix containing the most significant references aimed to employers and entrepreneurial actors concerning current legislation, facilitations and duties of each involved country for the work placement of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, including blind and VIP. The legislative review is not to be intended as fully exhaustive of the whole national legislations on these issues, but as a convenient examination (especially of the current available opportunities for business) as well as an interesting comparison between the situation in partner countries to make employers more aware and prepared to face these peculiar themes.

This part is followed by a roadmap of supporting organizations in which the employer can see which organization can be reached for support at the job. This may include coaching on the job, specialized equipment and ICTs or other forms of (financial) support.

GENERAL OVERVIEW ON:

1. ITALIAN LEGISLATION, FACILITATIONS AND DUTIES FOR EMPLOYERS

- **Italian Laws n. 68/1999 "Regulations on the right to employment for persons with disabilities"**

The Law on the employment of disabled people (Law no. 68 of 12 March 1999) is the main legislation concerning disability employment in Italy. The Italian Law 68/99 regulates the employment of people with disabilities in public and private enterprises. Based on the size of their workforce, both private and public sector employers are required to hire a certain percentage of disabled workers:

- Employers with more than 50 employees must meet a 7% disability employment quota;
- At least 2 disabled workers must be hired in workplaces of 36 to 50 employees;
- Workplaces of 15 to 35 employees must hire at least 1 disabled worker if they operate new intake.

Disabled workers hired on temporary contracts for a period of less than 9 months cannot be included in the percentage, in other words employers must hire disabled workers for longer periods to meet the legal requirement.

Employers who do not meet the disability employment target must pay a compensation fee to a specific fund.

- **Law N. 113 of 29 March 1985.**

In addition to this general legislation, various legal acts govern target disability employment in specific branches. The Italian Law 113/85 regulates the employment of visually impaired switchboard operators and comprehensively addresses vocational training, job placement, contracting and retirement schemes. All public offices and private companies with a switchboard of at least 5 telephone lines must hire one visually impaired telephone switchboard operator. Public offices with switchboards comprising more than one operator position must reserve no less than 51% of all positions to visually impaired people.

- **Law N. 29 of 11 January 1994.**
This law governs the employment of visually impaired rehabilitation therapists. Private nursing homes and public hospitals must hire at least one and up to 5% of visually impaired therapists.
- **Law N. 120 of 28 March 1991**
According to the Law n. 120/91 all visually impaired workers who are currently employed receive a bonus amounting to 4 monthly pension payments in addition to their wage for each working year.
- **Law N. 946 of 6 September 1967**
According to the Law n. 946/67 visually impaired teachers are entitled to specific benefits, including priority access to positions in blind schools and institutes and facilitated access to positions in mainstream schools.
- **Law N. 4 of 4 January 2004**
A very important law (known as **Stanca Law - 2004**), defines guidelines and specific obligations concerning accessibility of digital information, including applications and / or websites, and obligations for Public Administrations.

2. POLISH LEGISLATION, FACILITATIONS AND DUTIES FOR EMPLOYERS

- **Act of 27 August 1997 on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities**, *Place of publication: (Dz. U. z 2020 r. poz. 426, with further changes)*
The main act regulating overall support of persons with disabilities is the Act of Vocational and Social Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities of 29 August, 1997. The act has been amended to existing regulations and growing needs of persons with disabilities.
It describes and regulates or the duties and facilitations related to the employment of the disabled persons.

Employers who wish to hire a disabled person, may apply for a financial support coming from various sources. The district labour office, as one of such sources, apart from financial help, offers also services within vocational counselling. The legal basis for the activities of the labour offices is the Act of 20 April 2004 on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions.

All the forms of support that you can take advantage of as an employer are listed below.

If you employ a disabled person, you may apply for:

reimbursement of the costs borne on:

- the adaptation of premises for disabled people,
- the adaptation or acquisition of the equipment that will help disabled employees to perform their work or function in the workplace,
- the purchase and authorization of software that will be used by the employees with disabilities, and assistive technology devices that will facilitate their work,



- the diagnosis conducted by the occupational health services concerning needs referred to in the cases provided above,
- monthly subsidy to remuneration paid out to the disabled worker (only if the employee is included in the register of employed persons with disabilities compiled by National Disabled Persons Rehabilitation Fund (Polish PFRON)),
- reimbursement of the costs borne on employing an employee assisting a disabled person,
- reimbursement of the costs borne on providing equipment for a work-stand for a disabled person,
- reimbursement of the costs borne on a disabled employee's trainings,
- refund granted to an employer who employs a person with disabilities registered in a district labour office to work in the intervention works,
- refund granted to an employer who employs a person with disabilities registered in a district labour office to work in public works,
- refund granted to an employer who takes in a person with disabilities registered in a district labour office to participate in vocational training at the workplace.

Moreover, a district labour office may offer you a help in terms of:

- vocational counselling and information,
- work exchange.

The above mentioned information comes from:

<https://zielonalinia.gov.pl/web/zielona-linia/-/support-offered-to-employers-who-employ-people-with-disabilities-34790>

As mentioned above, to support employment, the Rehabilitation act and subsequent provisions enable to cover relevant costs to equip person's workplace so that they have proper tools to perform their work. These provisions impose obligation to the employer. It means such persons entitled for that compensation should be employed for at least thirty-six months. In case that person does not work or is not willing to work, an employer shall seek for persons with similar disabilities to employ them on the same post.

- **Governmental programme Accessibility Plus 2018–2025**

In order to provide friendly living conditions in Poland a comprehensive programme providing multifaceted, systemic and coordinated activities is necessary. These activities aim at improving quality and providing the independence of life for people with special needs, including the elderly and persons with permanent or temporary difficulties in mobility or perception. That will be achieved through the large-scale improvement in public space accessibility, including architecture, transport, products and services.

All these activities were incorporated into the governmental Programme Accessibility Plus.

The point "ACTIVITY 27 Employment in administration" of this Programme consists in increasing efforts taken in the PFRON (National Fund for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled) programme



“Stable employment – the disabled in administration and public service”. It will be directed to public administration entities and the State Treasury companies. It will consist in elimination of barriers in the access of people with disabilities to stable employment. As part of it, funding of workplace equipment, adaptation of rooms or purchase of devices facilitating the work performance or functioning in the working establishment will be implemented. Furthermore, the use of the service in the form of job coach is planned on the basis of statutory solutions. The changes will be made in the preparation of job advertisements for the needs of people with disabilities (information on possible improvements which already appear in job vacancies in public service but are not common, preferences for the employment of people with disabilities in the case of people with equal qualifications). The Activity also anticipates the opportunity of apprenticeship or training period in order to enable acquiring practical competences and meeting formal criteria necessary for later employment for people with disabilities.

- **The first Polish Strategy for Persons with Disabilities announced on 16.02.2021 (for the years 2021-2030)**

The Strategy will be a road map of national policy for people with disabilities.

The first Polish Strategy for Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the Council of Ministers, is a comprehensive document which will be a road map of national policy for persons with disabilities. It expresses primarily the concern about the inclusion of people with disabilities in social and professional life, with creating a space that is truly accessible for everyone.

A number of strategic actions were formulated on that basis; they were later grouped and divided into priority areas of the Strategy: work is one of them.

- **The Civil Service Act published on 21.11.2008**

It is the second (after the Constitution of the Republic of Poland), most important legal basis of the civil service. Due to a high decentralization of personnel policy in the civil service, the act serves more as a framework. It is supplemented by many regulations (issued by e.g. the Prime Minister, the Head of Civil Service and the Directors General of each office).

In the section 2 of the article 29a of the above mentioned document it is written that “If in the office of employment the rate of people with disabilities, in the meaning of the provisions on vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, in the month preceding the date of publishing the vacancy notice, is less than 6%, disabled persons are entitled to a priority in employment, if located in among those referred to in Section 1”. In the section 1 it is written that “During recruitment procedure, recruitment board, referred to in Art. 30 Section 2 item 5, select no more than five best candidates who meet the necessary requirements and to the greatest extent the additional requirements, and submit these candidates to the Director General of the office in order to employ of the selected candidate.”



3. AUSTRIAN LEGISLATION, FACILITATIONS AND DUTIES FOR EMPLOYERS

The following information are taken from Federal Ministry Republic of Austria⁶.

- **The obligation to employ people with disabilities and the compensatory tax**

Employment obligation: According to the Disability Employment Act (Section 1 para. 1), all businesses in Austria which employ 25 or more employees are obliged to take on one disabled person with beneficiary status (registered disabled person) for every 25 employees. For example, a company which employs 100 persons is obliged to employ four registered disabled persons (obligatory number of disabled employees: four). Employees with certain particularly severe disabilities (e.g. blind persons, wheelchair users) are counted double. In relation to the employment of people with disabilities, employers are exempted from local authority tax, from payments to the Family Burdens Equalisation Fund, from the Chamber of Commerce fee, and in Vienna from the tax to finance the underground system.

The compensation tax: If the obligation to employ people with disabilities is not, or not wholly fulfilled, the employer has to pay a compensatory tax per unfilled obligatory post and month.

- **Individual subsidies to compensate for the increased costs/effort involved in employing people with disabilities**

In addition to project subsidies, a large number of individual and customised [subsidies \(PDF, 298 KB\)](#) are offered to people with disabilities and/or their employers to provide support and/or compensate for the additional costs and effort involved and disability-related lower productivity.

Individual subsidies can be granted for:

- work and training (technical work aids, training costs, training allowances, the assumption of costs for sign language interpreters, etc.);
- wage subsidies (inclusion subsidy/plus, wage and workplace subsidies, inclusion bonus for apprentices, security allowance for self-employed persons with disabilities), and
- mobility (orientation and mobility training, acquisition of an assistance dog, mobility allowance, obtaining a driving licence, purchasing a vehicle, etc.).

- **Subsidies for companies**

A comprehensive programme of subsidies for non-wage labour costs is designed to encourage companies to create jobs for people with disabilities and to ensure that the new employment relationship is a long-term one.

⁶ <https://www.sozialministerium.at/en/Topics/Social-Affairs/People-with-Disabilities/The-participation-in-employment-of-people-with-disabilities.html>



Inclusion subsidies/inclusion subsidies plus: If a company has received an integration allowance from the Public Employment Service (AMS) for a registered disabled person (degree of disability at least 50%), an inclusion subsidy of 30 percent of their gross wage can subsequently be obtained for a period of twelve months. Companies which are not obliged to employ people with disabilities can receive an inclusion subsidy amounting to 37.5 percent of the person's gross wage (inclusion subsidy Plus).

Inclusion bonus for apprentices/trainees: The inclusion bonus supports certain companies when they hire apprentices/trainees who are registered disabled persons. This support is possible during the entire duration of the apprenticeship or extended apprenticeship regardless of the age of the apprentice/trainee. The amount depends on the applicable rate of compensatory tax.

Wage subsidy: Wage subsidies can be granted to companies for a registered disabled person (degree of disability at least 50%) in accordance with the reduced level of performance of the person which has been established. The subsidy is dependent on the disability-related reduction in performance.

Job safeguarding subsidy: The job safeguarding subsidy can be granted for people with a level of disability of at least 30%. The specific amount of this non-wage labour cost subsidy is determined by how endangered the job is, the age of the employee affected, and his/her opportunities to find another job in the near future. In addition, there are grants to compensate for competitive disadvantages caused by disabilities. These include technical aids, mobility aids or relevant individual skills training.

Business people with disabilities: In order to support people with disabilities in becoming self-employed, there are subsidies to improve their financial situation and to secure their livelihoods. Business people with disabilities can be granted subsidies to found a self-employed business or to provide security for an already existing self-employed activity when a temporary disability-related situation is threatening their livelihood.

Further information on support for companies and people with disabilities can be found on the website of the [Sozialministeriumservice](#) and at www.arbeitundbehinderung.at.

- **Social enterprises**

[Social enterprises](#) are establishments for the integration into employment of people with disabilities who, due to the severity of their disability, are not yet able to work (or to return to) the general labour market.

Social enterprises are managed as limited companies on the basis of commercial principles. Social enterprises only receive funding to compensate for the disadvantages which arise in competition with other companies as a result of employing people with disabilities. In this way, social enterprises are put on an equal footing with other companies. Like other companies, they



have to offer products and services which are competitive on the free market. There are eight social enterprises in Austria with over 20 locations.

4. DUTCH LEGISLATION, FACILITATIONS AND DUTIES FOR EMPLOYERS

Working with a visual impairment? THAT'S POSSIBLE!

A nice job, pleasant colleagues, career opportunities, an excellent salary with good secondary employment conditions. That's what people with a visual impairment want as much as anyone else.

Hiring a disabled employee can also benefit you financially. The main advantages??

- **Wage compensation in case of illness (= No risk policy)**

If one of your employees becomes ill, you normally continue to pay the wages for the first two years. If an employee with a disability becomes ill, you will receive a sickness benefit from the UWV with which you can pay a large part of the wage costs. The cause of the disease does not matter. It may therefore also be something other than the original health complaints. This sickness benefit also applies to employees who fall within the target group of the jobs agreement/participation act. If you hire someone who has a Wajong benefit or has ever had a Wajong benefit, you can always, even after five years, receive a Sickness Benefits Act if this employee becomes ill. You also do not pay an increased premium for this employee if this employee ends up in a WGA benefit.

- **Wage cost advantage / Low Income Advantage**

Available tool: www.subsidiecalculator.nl

You are entitled to a wage cost benefit if you hire an employee with a WAO, WIA or Wajong benefit or someone who is older than 56 years and receives a benefit. There are several conditions that you/your employee must meet. One of these is a target group statement LKV; you must apply for this statement within 3 months after employment with the UWV or municipality (in the case of a social assistance benefit). You will receive this wage cost benefit for a maximum of 3 years. Application for LKV runs through the wage declaration. If your employee has become incapacitated for work and there is a re-employment in new/adapted jobs in your organization, the wage cost benefit applies for a maximum of one year. If you hire someone who falls within the target group of the jobs agreement/ Participation Act AND this person cannot earn the statutory minimum-wage independently, then a Low Income Benefit can be requested via the tax authorities. Conditions are: a total of at least 1,248 paid hours for this employee (even if he or she enters employment during the year!) AND this employee has an average hourly wage between € 10.05 and € 12.58 (amounts 2019).



More information via the belastingdienst.nl

NOTE: LKV and LIV cannot be merged: it is either LKV or LIV

- **Job coach UWV**

In the case of a trial placement or an employment contract, a Job Coach can be used for the duration of this, which is paid for by the UWV. In principle, the award is made per period of up to 6 months. There is a maximum of three years of job coaching. This job coach can also be arranged internally.

- **Test placement**

Are you unsure whether your disabled employee can cope with the work? Then you can request a two-month trial placement from the UWV. You do not have to pay wages when awarded; the UWV continues to pay the benefit. The UWV must give permission for this trial placement in advance; your new employee will request this permission from the UWV together with you. Extension is possible.

- **Wage dispensation**

Wage dispensation can be requested from the UWV if your employee demonstrably performs less than other employees. An employment expert from the UWV determines whether the employee is indeed performing less well. If this is the case, you can get permission to pay a lower wage than the CAO Wage or the minimum wage. This scheme only applies to employees who receive a Wajong benefit!

NOTE: This scheme is available to government and educational organizations.

SPECIAL GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYERS

Operational Annex

- The MATCH – Check list
- Road-map



The MATCH

Checklist of job opportunities for Applicants with a visual impairment

How to use the MATCH

Place the checklist next to the job description and check whether the job is suitable or can be made possible for an employee with a visual impairment.

We call it a **MATCH** if ...

|M|OBILITY

- ... The work is accessible with public transport.
- ... Someone finds the way in the building
- ... The guidedog (if any) is welcome.

A mobilitytrainer / jobcoach can support during the start/first period

QUESTIONS / ADVISE?

Do you have questions?

Just call: 0341 498 498.

|A|DJUSTMENTS

- ... the work is made accessible with soft- en hardware-modifications, such as speech and magnificationsoftware or a brailledisplay.
- ... Attention is paid to workplace design and lighting

Technology offers possibilities! An expert will be glad to help. Also in the compensation of costs. A subsidy is possible for portable facilities.

|T|ASK(S)

- ... It is clear which tasks can be performed.

The (re)distribution of tasks between colleagues often results in a win-win situation. Talents / qualities of the entire team are thus better utilized. Safety must be guaranteed when carrying out work. .

|C|OMMUNICATION

- ... Agreements are made about different forms of communication.

Tell e.g. what's on a bulletin board; communicate by e-mail, or Mention the name of the person who speaks during the meeting.

Any doubts?

With the help of a professional you convert opportunities into employment possibilities!

Each visual impairment differs.

There are many options.

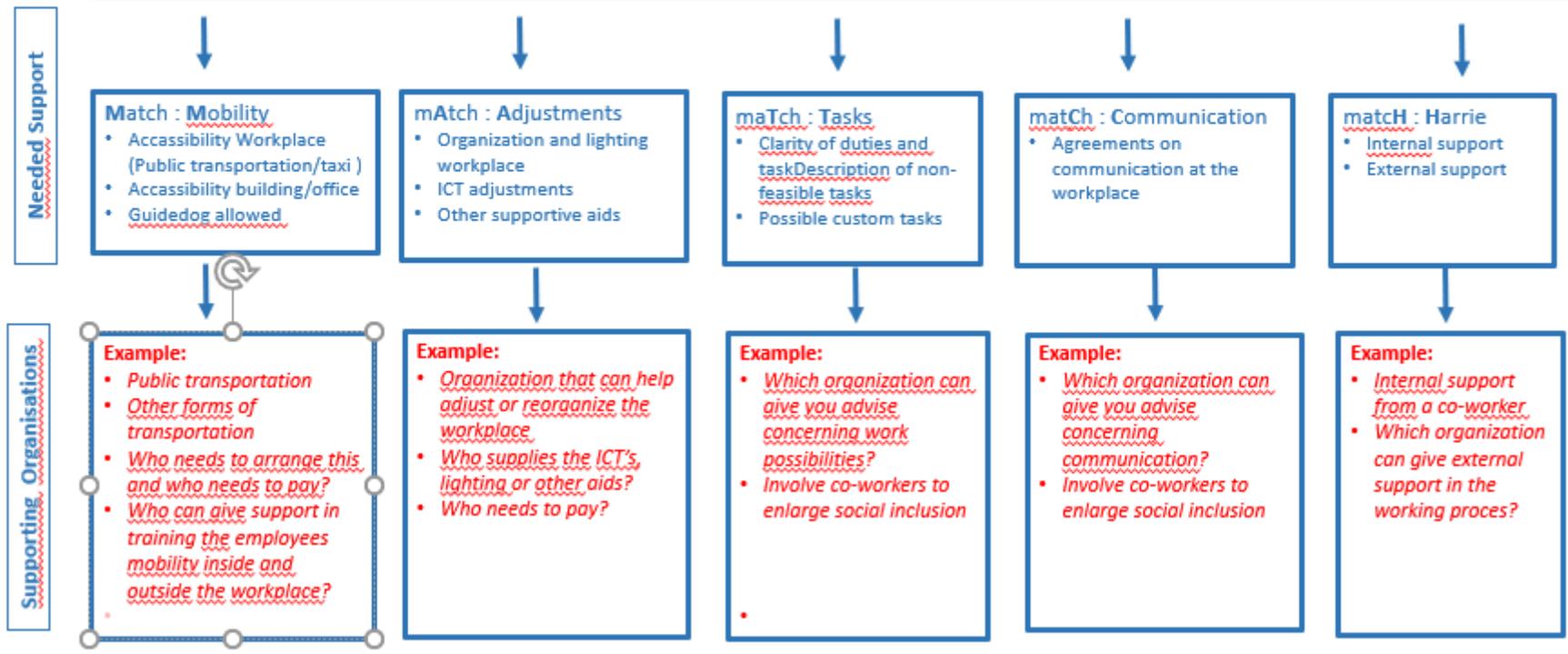
|H|ELP

- ... There's a colleague to support and to spar with.

From the first workingday onwards, pair the new colleague with a buddy who will show him/her the way. Support from an external jobcoach focuses not only on the new employee, But also on colleagues. This contributes to a sustainable employment relationship.



ROADMAP SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS



Conclusions

The COVID19 affair, if ever there was a need, has brought to our attention a number of points that are certainly present in the specific regulations concerning persons with disabilities, as well as in the most noteworthy practical achievements. The work carried out as part of the RADAR project has shown us the relevance of these points and, even more so if it were necessary, the urgency of activating and maintaining a working methodology based on a) sharing; b) the idea that "no one is saved alone".

In fact, in extreme synthesis, the points we would like to emphasise in our conclusion are the following:

a) work is a VALUE, not only for the individual, but also and above all for the local and national community; every euro aimed at creating job opportunities, especially for people with disabilities, means hundreds of euros spared for cure and dependent life.

b) We have learned that the only certainty, even for the near future, is change, which, despite ourselves, will often be unforeseen, rapid and increasingly profound, i.e. it will affect not a single task, not a cycle of work, but more often a framework, e.g. a cluster of factors;

c) conversely, the present global situation concerning interdependence and interconnection can also give more job opportunities to people with disabilities, in our case with visual impairments;

d) the research work carried out in the RADAR project, the good practices, tell us that the idea of relying rather on what remains than on what is lacking is still valid. And what remains, in the past as today, in the case of people with visual disabilities is essentially: knowledge, know-how, communication skills, the ability to design and self-design. Paradoxically, the blind person, who in classical culture was also a "seer", must still be able to "look beyond", beyond the everyday, beyond the status quo; he or she must be able to plan for the future, and identify credible job opportunities in advance.

We can say that, tendentially, the key skills also for the future will be:

- character skills (perseverance, resistance to frustration, flexibility);

imagery and creativeness, enabling us to anticipate future scenarios;

social skills, i.e. the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships and to ask for the right help, which the visually impaired person is likely to need;

- the willingness to learn, to challenge oneself;



- certainly the ability to use assistive/adaptive technologies, good knowledge of languages, even in lesser-used languages (e.g. Chinese).

In spite of regulations and proclamations, it is foreseeable that there will be an increasing need for remote support services, to make machines, programmes and procedures really usable and not only declared as such; on this point, the professional organisations will certainly have to use their traditional experience to influence national policies concerning work support services, and, at international level, the regulations that regulate and verify usability; in this sense, it is desirable to create job guidance services on the one hand, and support services on the other, to meet the needs of usability, which are expected to continue to exist.

- manual skills will always be in high demand, but the number of key sectors will be reduced: RADAR has shown that the telephone operator faces a reduction in opportunities, also in relation to technologies that reduce the number of operator positions; on the other hand

the operator in the wellness sector will presumably still have his own place of respect;

- Last but not least, employment relationships will probably undergo profound changes, and they will not only be classic relationship between employer and employee, but rather individual or small group enterprises will make their way in.

Every age has its challenges: After the invention of the Braille method, which we can consider the beginning of the emancipation of the blind, profound changes have affected the job situation of the blind.

In Italy, for example, the art of massage was introduced by Aurelio Nicolodi, and the first masseurs were blind; in Germany the profession of stenotypist was created by and for blind people, around the 1950s. These and other examples should guide us for the future, knowing that, as we mentioned in our presentation, today the primary objective must be social inclusion, which is both a goal that moves forward, a working method and a strategy, aimed at enhancing the most valuable resource we have, namely the human person. Inclusion cannot be done alone, but, we must always keep in mind, inclusion only begins when we put it into practice.

Prof. Antonio Quatraro

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