



## SURVEY REPORT

# PRACODAWCA NA TAK

**10 principles for successfully employing  
people with disabilities**



**TAK**pełnosprawni

**2021**

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## Dear Reader,

For years, the employment rate of people with disabilities in Poland has been too low.

Completed in May 2021, the 'Pracodawca na TAK' survey points to the lack of knowledge and education about working with people with disabilities and a number of unfair stereotypes in circulation as key factors preventing their presence on the open job market.

How does one change that? This report is intended to accomplish that very goal. It contains **timeless guidance on ways to build teams of people with diverse abilities**. Not only does it list the challenges identified by the respondents to our survey, but also suggests improvements.

An integral part of this report are the **10 principles of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network** which outline ways to strategically and comprehensively manage disability in the workplace. We are the first organisation in Poland to have described and adapted this international standard, which was designed by our partner, to better suit Polish realities.

The next goal we set for ourselves was to **present various perspectives**. To that end, we interviewed experts, employers, and people with disabilities. **The observations they shared are as important as the data we have collected**.

This report **is not a guide to statistics and the financial benefits** of employing people with disabilities. I am confident you will readily notice other advantages of maintaining a diverse team.

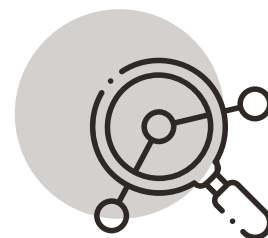
People with disabilities constitute a large and diverse group. Their inclusion in **both business and society is a sheer necessity**, not least due to the ongoing demographic changes and societal aging. Although I myself do not live with any disability at the moment, I may well be forced to make adjustments to remain professionally active a few years from now.



The people who embrace diversity today will in fact invest in their future. **There is no diversity without disability**. I sincerely hope that this publication will make you share this belief.

**Agata Robińska**, President of the  
TAKpełnosprawni Foundation

# Results of the 'Pracodawca na TAK' survey



This latest 'Pracodawca na TAK' survey is the second one we have conducted. Its first edition was held in the late 2014 and early 2015. What are its key lessons learned? The perception of the labour market differs significantly between employers and employees. In addition, over **60% of employers believe that the labour market has become friendlier to people with disabilities**, whereas only **39% of employees notice any difference in the way they are treated**. These findings reveal an urgent need for dialogue between the two groups.

According to employers, the most significant barriers to employing people with disabilities are **the lack of experience** with such employment (64%)\*, **fears that people with disabilities are less efficient** (56%), and **limited knowledge** on the benefits of employing such individuals (44%).

Interestingly, we have found that **the same barriers are the top three ones indicated by people with disabilities**: fear of lower efficiency (67%)\*, lack of experience working with people with disabilities (60%), and limited knowledge about the benefits of employing such persons (51%). A staggering 80% of respondents with disabilities and 82% of the surveyed employers believe that some workers fail to report their disabilities to their employers for fear of losing their jobs.



**According to our data, the main challenge faced by both employers and employees is the lack of a social education. People with disabilities make equally good employees as individuals without disabilities. This is not only the core contention of this publication but also the opinion of 82% of the surveyed employers (77% of whom claim to see no difference between the performance of employees with and without disabilities while 5% believe that people with disabilities work even better).**

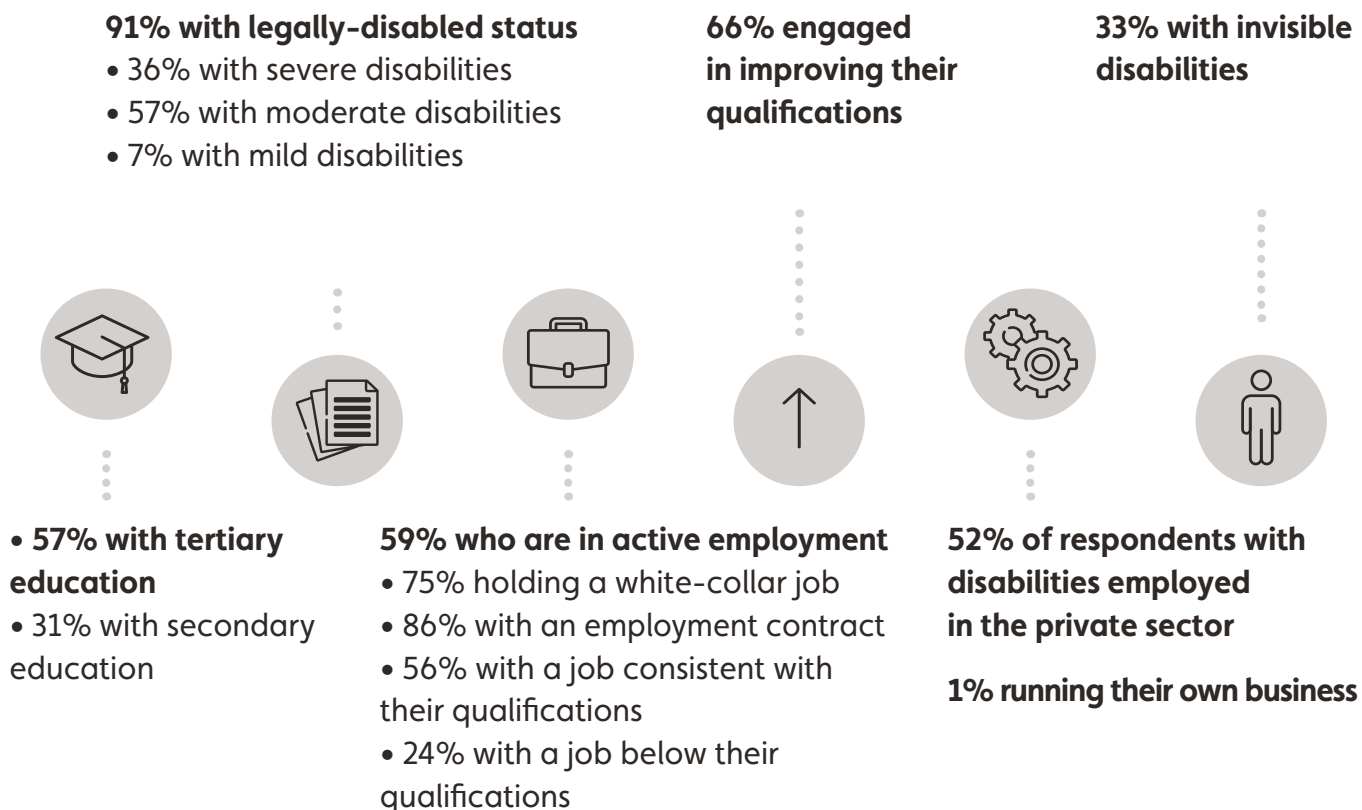
The survey was carried out between January and May 2021. It consisted of two questionnaires given to the two target groups of employers and people with disabilities. A total of 810 respondents, 594 of whom were people with disabilities and 216 of whom were employers, participated in the project. The survey was conducted electronically using Webankieta.pl (Startquestion.com) and distributed to both groups by numerous partners through multiple channels, including online forums and social media.



\* Multiple-choice question, the scores do not add up to 100%.

# People with disabilities

## 594 respondents



In the survey, people with disabilities indicated they need a steady job with career advancement opportunities, decent remuneration (equal to that of people without disabilities) and flexible working hours. Many stated they dreamed of working with people in a supportive team. People with disabilities do not want their employers to see them chiefly for their disabilities or as the people who attract state subsidies (subsidies provided by PFRON: the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities).

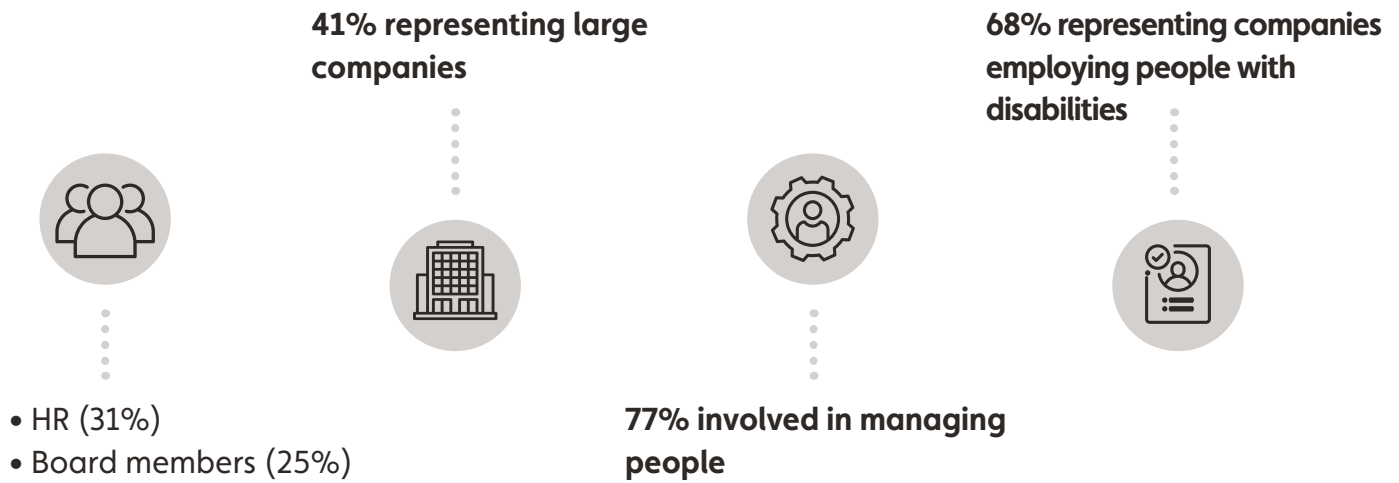
**Their first concern is to be employed on the same terms as everyone else and only, as a secondary consideration, to be treated equally.** The prejudices and stereotypes that have become entrenched over the course of many years do not make this any easier.

## What do people with disabilities say?

- 39% of the people with disabilities believe that their treatment on the labour market has not changed over the last 5 years.
- 24% of employees with disabilities have failed to disclose their legally-disabled status to their employers while every third such person justifies this with bad experience in their previous jobs.
- 57% of employees with disabilities hold a mid-to-high-level position. One in ten such workers is an executive, manager or supervisor.
- 67% of people with disabilities believe that employers refuse to hire people with disabilities out of concern they are less efficient.
- 33% of employees with disabilities have worked for the same employer for 5 or more years.

# Employers

216 employers



The survey shows that many employers lack even the most basic knowledge on the benefits of employing people with disabilities although **71% of the respondents admit that the expected financial benefits make them more willing to employ people with disabilities.** The employers also lack knowledge on the rights of people with disabilities and employer responsibilities with that respect. The vast majority of employers (82%) positively evaluate the performance and commitment of people with disabilities. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, companies are also more open to the idea of remote work, which can increase the employability of people with disabilities.

## What do the surveyed employers say?

- 64% of the employers believe that the labour market is friendlier towards people with disabilities than it was 5 years ago.
- 41% of the employers admit that their companies made no effort in the last couple of years to employ people with disabilities.
- 41% of the employers do not want to employ people with disabilities because they do not know how to work with them.
- 73% of the employers declare that having employees with disabilities on their teams increases mutual empathy among other employees.
- 25% of the employers believe that the fear of people with disabilities having particularly many demands stops them from employing such persons.
- 41% of the employers are of the opinion that a failure to disclose their legally-disabled status to an employer may harm people with disabilities (contributing to health and/or safety issues and failures to make workplace accommodations and resulting in the loss of the disabled status).

## Observations from the surveyed people with disabilities

“ In an adjusted environment, my disability can't be seen and tends to go unnoticed. All one has to do is listen to suggestions and adjust the workplace.



”

Epilepsy effectively excludes me from the labour market – it is sad that ignorance about this condition becomes such a barrier.

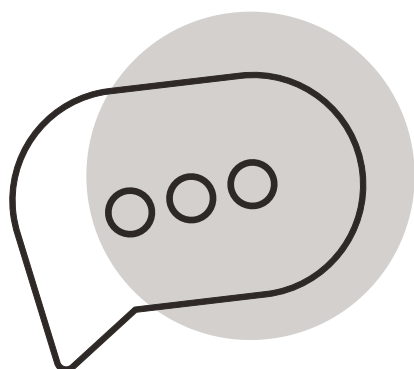


“ I am always picked on at work for my disability, even though I never use it as an excuse, apply myself more and perform better than people without disabilities.

”

If you are an employer, don't be afraid of us. If there's something you don't know, just ask.

“ Break your stereotypes, treat us and expect of us the same you would of any person without disabilities. Where barriers exist, take measures to eliminate them. Many one-off measures will hold for many years.



”

People with disabilities are more likely to value their job more because they are more afraid of losing it.

## Observations from the surveyed employers

“ People with disabilities tend to be more committed and loyal to the employer.



“

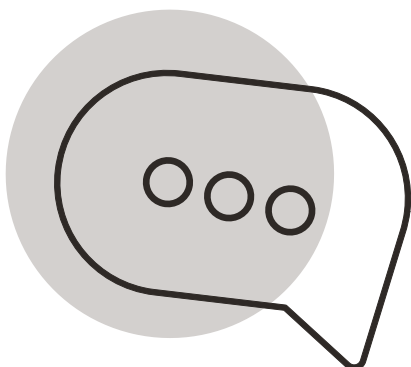
There is no database on job seekers with disabilities. As a result, we have no way of reaching them.

“ Some people with disabilities believe that since their employer can receive a wage subsidy, they do not have to apply themselves that much and cannot be expected to do as much as a person without disabilities in the same job.



“

If a disability poses a risk to one's health or life, the supervisor and colleagues of a person with disabilities should be aware of his/her health condition to ensure that person's safety.





# Beliefs about the labour market held by people with disabilities

## Step one – take action!

Iga Jendrych, a CSR Communication and Education specialist at LOTTE Wedel and Agata Spała, an expert in employing people with disabilities, share their views on the employment of such people. See for yourself that disability does not have to exclude a person from the labour market!



**Agata Robińska:** People with disabilities tend to assume that employers are dishonest and that all they care about is to cut costs. What are they really like?

**Iga Jendrych:** : I have seen all kinds of employers, including some bad ones. None of that would dissuade me though from looking for a job. In my understanding of things, I have come to the point where I see the fact that my employer can reduce costs by employing me as an advantage. As long as the company I work for pays me fairly, I do not see why having my employer benefit from what the law and the system provide should bother me.

**Agata Spała:** People's experience with employers varies widely as do their ethical standards and their motivations to employ people with disabilities. Cost cutting and subsidies are just an incentive. I do not understand why PFRON subsidies are being demonised. After all, they improve employment opportunities and allow people to pursue their career goals while providing employers with additional benefits. Neither can I agree that a company that receives subsidies gets free labour. This is not true! No subsidies cover all costs of employment. I repeat: subsidies are a mere incentive.



**IJ:** Let me add that I have heard of a case of financial discrimination. An HR officer informed a person with a disability who was applying for a job about the rate paid to a person without disabilities in the same position. That rate was considerably higher than the one offered to the person with a disability. That is clearly unfair but we cannot generalise based on this case.

**AS:** While the case that Iga described is one of discrimination and unfair treatment, the use of subsidies that are allowed by law absolutely is not.

**There is a popular belief that it is much harder for people with disabilities to find**

## **a job, but you two seem to disprove this view.**

**IJ:** It is obviously harder because so many employers hold disability-related stereotypes, particularly about work performance. I heard such opinions 5 years ago when I first entered the labour market, and I still hear them today, although not quite as often. But again, this is no reason to stop trying. Especially nowadays, at a time when many companies care greatly about corporate social responsibility (CSR) and their organisation's image. Employing people with disabilities helps companies financially by reducing their payments, making the market eligible for PFRON subsidies and improving their image. I believe that all this benefits us as a group.

**AS:** Two common reasons prevent people from securing employment: one is employer stereotypes and anxieties, the other the job seekers' skills being a poor match for market demands. Qualified people who improve their skills and respond to market trends tend to be quick to find employment. Gone are the times when legally-disabled status alone would secure a job. What is key for today's employees is to self-improve, develop soft skills such as self-presentation, and learn foreign languages.

### **Some of our respondents have indicated they expected special treatment from their employers. What do you think about this?**



**IJ:** First of all, employees need to know their rights. These might include time off to see a doctor, extra vacation days, or shorter working time.

None of these qualify as special treatment, they are the law. It is important to respect the needs of people with disabilities, but not to favour them with additional benefits. For example, it would be absurd to expect an employer to repaint the walls of a room in your home in a different colour because the present one depresses you when you work in it remotely.

**AS:** Respect for a person's rights is not special treatment. The legally-disabled status entitles one to shorter working time, additional breaks, and extra leave. Such is the law. However, if a person with a disability forces an employer to grant that person benefits over and above those enshrined in the law, one should think about whether hiring such a person makes sense for that employer. What is important is to treat people equally while accommodating the needs of employees with disabilities.

### **Some job seekers claim there are no opportunities for them to get an education and that they do not know which career path to take. What is your experience?**



**IJ:** Due to my disability, I cannot use stairs. In my university building, one had to climb eight steps to get to the elevator. I could not afford an assistant and I had to negotiate those eight steps twice a day for seven years. I got my fellow-student friends to help me with mobility and other technical difficulties and I managed. I absolutely refuse to accept the claim that a person with a disability cannot get an education. The rule I live by is to look for

opportunities in problems, not for problems in opportunities.

### **And what do you think about remote education?**

**AS:** Such education was possible even before Covid-19, but with the current pandemic, it has gained much popularity. For people with disabilities, this is a great opportunity to improve their skills. Of course the downside is the lack of face-to-face interaction with teachers, but this does not take away from the quality of online courses and training. Now is the perfect time to upskill.

**IJ:** Note also that the pandemic sold many employers on remote recruitment and telework. This is a big advantage for people with disabilities.

### **The common myth regarding work among people with disabilities is 'they cannot be employed because as a result they will lose their disability pension!'**

**IJ:** No pension is ever a substitute for the satisfaction you can derive from earning a salary. Your loved ones may well argue that 'you may always lose your job, but a pension is forever'. The truth is that more often than not such sentiments are shared by people around you but not necessarily by people with disabilities themselves.

**AS:** Having a job is not only about money. It is also about interacting with other people, gaining new experiences, and being personally and financially independent. The longer a person stays outside of the labour market, the harder it is to enter or re-enter it. For people aged 35 to 40, it is simply very late to get their first job. A disability pension is not worth abandoning your career goals and the benefits of having a job for. And make no mistake: it is possible to both work and continue to collect a pension.

**IJ:** I got my first job at the age of 30 and now realise it was late. Currently, people 5 to 10 years younger than me hold the same jobs or positions with comparable job descriptions. Only in hindsight do I realise what a late starter I was.

### **And what about a legally-disabled status that says 'must work in a protected environment' or 'unfit for all work'?**

**AS:** Being legally disabled is not a ban on employment. Only an occupational physician can determine what jobs a person can and cannot do. No rules underpinning the legally-disabled status bar employment.

### **Would you like to add anything else?**

**IJ:** Many people with disabilities feel inferior to people without disabilities in many ways, including in employment. Just because we do less work than people without disabilities in the same time does not mean we are poor employees. Every person has a potential waiting to be tapped.

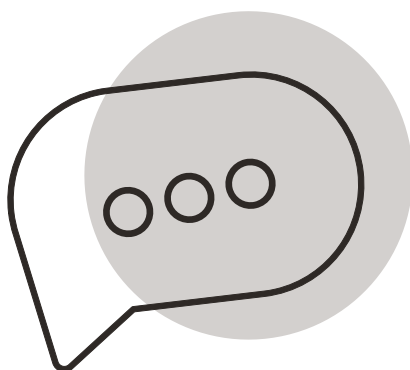


**AS:** The key is to increase qualifications that are needed on the labour market. Even if a person does not know which direction to take, there are employment counsellors that can help you define your goal. People with disabilities need to do exactly the same thing as people without disabilities – take action!



**Iga Jendrych** – a psychologist by education, she is Communication and CSR Education Specialist at LOTTE Wedel. In 2019, she won the Mazowiecka Lady D. im. Krystyny Bochenek award in the Professional Life category. In her personal life, she is the author of the Kobieta na Barykadach (Woman on a Barricade) fan page in which she promotes an active life with a disability.







**Agata Spala** – expert on the employment of people with disabilities, author of programmes supporting organisations to open up to people with disabilities, and trainer. She is recognised as being one of Poland's top 100 most influential people with disabilities.



# Employers' beliefs about people with disabilities

## Do not believe in myths!

Too many beliefs about disability lead to negative outlooks and stereotypes in the labour market. Discussed below are some of the myths that surround disability, as expressed by employers. Do not let them fool you!

-  **MYTH:** People with disabilities are not a significant group.
-  **FACT:** People with disabilities make up 15% of the world's population or number over a billion. They are the world's largest and fastest-growing minority. The ageing of Poland's society increases the prevalence of chronic conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and mental disorders. No organisation can afford to ignore such a substantial group. Perhaps your team already includes people with disabilities that have not been disclosed yet or that cannot be seen.
-  **MYTH:** People with disabilities require ramps and other expensive accommodations.
-  **FACT:** People with disabilities are a very diverse group. Many of them have disabilities that do not require architectural or other costly reasonable accommodations. However, the majority of them care for a friendly work environment, equal treatment, career opportunities and a chance to be actively involved in the life of their company. If a company building does not meet the needs of people with disabilities, it is best to offer remote work and consider applying for PFRON subsidies and improving building accessibility.
-  **MYTH:** People with disabilities are unskilled.
-  **FACT:** People with disabilities are not a homogenous group. Some of them have excellent credentials, hold university degrees, and have skills that are valued on the labour market. Disability can develop with age or result from an injury or accident, without necessarily depriving the person of the knowledge and experience acquired over the years. Therefore, we should fight for a job market that is accessible to all, also in our self-interest as we too may grow less fit with age but may still want or need to work. Some people with disabilities may not be sufficiently skilled due to limited access to education. However, they can be trained and taught to perform work in a given position. A university degree alone is not a ticket to a job. Many jobs do not require such a degree at all.



- ❌ **MYTH:** People with disabilities are constantly in treatment and on sick leave.
- ✅ **FACT:** Although a disability may be caused by a disease, this does not mean that the majority of people with disabilities will be constantly ill. Every employee, with or without a disability, may come down with a cold and go on sick leave. To assume that a disability will permanently keep a worker on leave is both very harmful and unfair. Many people with disabilities want to and can work full time with the same level of dedication as employees without disabilities.
- ❌ **MYTH:** Employers should offer jobs to people with disabilities accordingly to the type of their disability.
- ✅ **FACT:** Not every sightless person dreams of becoming a masseur and not every individual using mobility aids wants to have a simple desk job. People are assigned to teams based on their qualifications, skills, and interests, not their disabilities. The best way to employ a person with a disability is to assess their capacities against the demands of a given job.
- ❌ **MYTH:** People with disabilities are demanding.
- ✅ **FACT:** As in any other large social group, people with disabilities may include individuals who are demanding. This is a matter of personality and/or prior personal experience but not disability. Many people with disabilities are highly motivated to work and willing to face new challenges. Bear in mind that the need to be treated equally in the workplace (e.g. be given access to education and the training that is necessary to perform the work) is not being demanding. At times reasonable accommodations may be needed to enable people with disabilities to unlock their full potential.





# 10 principles

## for the successful employment of people with disabilities



“ The ten principles of the Charter of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network have proven to provide practical and effective guidance for companies worldwide that are committed to bringing their disability inclusion efforts to the next level. The Network hopes that they will also support enterprises in Poland to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in their workforce and operations.

**Jürgen Menze**, Disability Inclusion Officer at ILO  
Global Business and Disability Network



International  
Labour  
Organization

GLOBAL BUSINESS  
AND DISABILITY  
NETWORK



# PRINCIPLE 1

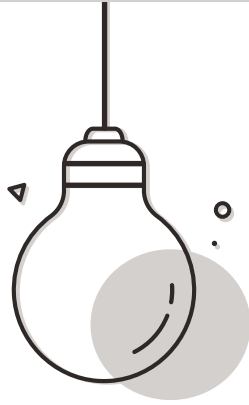
## Change your thinking and beliefs

### Respect for and promotion of rights



#### Imagine that...

You make an impulse decision to employ a person with a disability because you have heard about the financial benefits you can gain (subsidies provided by PFRON, State Fund For the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities). However, even on day one you realise that your organisation is completely unprepared to work with people with disabilities. Not in terms of architectural or technological accessibility but rather because of the mindset! For this reason, you follow the right order of things: education should come before action.



#### How to educate your employees about working in a diverse team?

##### Board initiative

A change as profound as building a team whose members vary in their abilities will not be possible without the involvement of top management. The team assigned to the project should include at least one key decision-maker. This will make project implementation more effective. The involvement of top management will strengthen the work diversity message and show the entire organisation that the project is being taken seriously.



#### What is the advantage of building diverse teams?

- By giving people with disabilities a chance, you can count on their **loyalty** and thus **reduce employee turnover**.
- You react to **demographic changes**.
- You ensure that relationships in your workplace are based on respect for diversity and that your employees have a sense of **security** this will unlock greater creativity and **innovation**.
- You will tangibly cut costs and boost your reputation as an attractive employer.



Disability can lead to **new opportunities on the market**. An electric toothbrush is a great example as it was created for patients with limited motor skills, and nowadays is used by people all around the world.



## Training

Including a module on disability in the onboarding process is considered good practice. However, training and workshops should not limit themselves to awareness raising. Managers and recruiters must learn **specific skills**. It is a good idea to involve multiple business units and employees from various levels.

### Possible courses

- How to manage a diverse team? *(for managers)*
- What reasonable disability-related adjustments should be provided for people with different types of disabilities? *(for managers)*
- How to conduct an inclusive recruitment process and a job interview free from any bias and stereotypes? *(for HR)*
- How to create a job offer that attracts applications from jobseekers with disabilities? *(for HR)*
- How to ensure digital access for employees with disabilities? *(for IT)*
- Who are people with disabilities and how can they contribute to the development of your organisation? *(for all employees)*



## Regular education

Remember that no single training course will produce long-term effects unless the information is regularly recycled and built upon. It is therefore a good practice to include additional **awareness-building** and **disease prevention** in internal communications. Holidays such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the World Diabetes Day, and the World Mental Health Day provide excellent opportunities for doing just that.

The messages need to be **compelling** and **unconventional** so that employees focused on their daily tasks take note and remember them. An example is learning through play (quizzes, gamification).

## The rights of people with disabilities

In your internal education, **place friendly emphasis on the rights of people with disabilities**. The Polish law entitles employees with disabilities to an additional 15 minute break, shorter working time in some cases, and additional days off. Make sure that such rights do not evoke envy, rumours or resentment on the part of co-workers.



### 3 steps towards change

1. Recognise and highlight the business benefits to be derived from employing people with disabilities.
2. Find interesting ways to educate your workers about the value of diverse teams.
3. Hold regular training for employees from various business units to provide them with the up-to-date knowledge and skills they will need to work in diverse teams.



**Klaudia Malisz, HR Manager at Job Impulse**



For many years now we have been building an organisational culture of openness to diversity and employing people with disabilities in various positions. They enjoy their rights, including shorter working time and additional leaves of absence. Over the years we have learned that such adjustments do not take away from people's dedication or impair their performance. The fear that the granting of rights to employees with disabilities will be resented by team members without disabilities is groundless as long as the company ensures effective communication and cooperation in teams, and that, as soon as the new system is rolled out, workers across the board are properly educated and that diversity is promoted as a team's strength. We have also found it helpful to use additional tools such as a dedicated internal funding programme designed to address disability-related needs that has been made available to employees.

”

**Izabela Chocianowska, Wellbeing Manager  
at Orange Polska**



The goal of the 'Zdrowie na tak' (Yes for Health) programme is to build an open friendly workplace, especially for people with disabilities. As part of that programme, we have set up an internal team of experts who support our managers in managing diverse teams and dealing with legal issues of employing people with disabilities, and building tolerance for diversity and etiquette. Such efforts have raised the awareness of the needs of people with disabilities among our team members while providing our company with valuable employees. The share of people with disabilities in our labour force has also been increased.

**Maria Wlaźlak, Head of Relations and Ethics  
at Santander Bank Polska**

We aim to build an inclusive and diverse work environment. We employ people with disabilities and constantly raise the awareness of their rights and needs among our employees and managers. Since 2018, we have been running the 'Różnosprawni' (Differently-abled) project that has helped us achieve these goals. We place a great deal of emphasis on educational campaigns. An example are videos made to celebrate the International Day of Sign Languages and the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. We have produced and are continually developing educational materials, including guidebooks on employee rights, recruitment and workplace modifications to accommodate people with disabilities as well as good practices for interacting with such persons. Our employees with disabilities may also receive financial healthcare benefits. In addition, we offer our employees advice on how to obtain legally-disabled status. All of these efforts help steadily increase the share of people with disabilities we employ.

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# 2

## PRINCIPLE 2

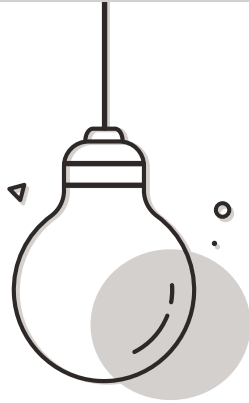
### Obey the law!

#### Non-discrimination



#### Imagine that...

You are recruiting workers to fill an office opening. A strong candidate for the job is a person with a disability. However, you have another application from a person without a legally-disabled status. In the end, you choose the latter because you are concerned about disability-related issues. This is a textbook case of discrimination, even if caused by the lack of knowledge.



#### How to employ persons with disabilities in accordance with the law?

##### Non-discrimination policy

As stipulated in the **Polish Labour Code**, **disability is an attribute protected by law** while employers are required to prevent discrimination. The key to achieving this goal is to produce a widely accessible and easy-to-understand internal policy statement. This document should define non-discrimination regulations, be attached to every employment contract and be discussed in mandatory training, particularly with management.

##### What should such a document contain?

- definitions of direct and indirect discrimination, sexual and other harassment, and bullying,
- a clear message stating that such behaviours are unacceptable and will not be tolerated in your organisation,
- information on how and where an employee can report such behaviours anonymously, and that the matter will be resolved in-house by an independent committee,
- information about the disciplinary measures to be taken against violators.



## Recruitment policy

The other non-discrimination document is the recruitment policy.

Recruiters should apply the same evaluation criteria to every candidate. For example, they may make use of a standard interview checklist. They also need to know **what questions they can put to people with disabilities**. For example, questions such as 'what has caused your disability?' or 'what medications are you on?' are not allowed. It is important to clearly present job descriptions, ask about any special needs, and objectively evaluate the candidate based on the skills required for a given job.

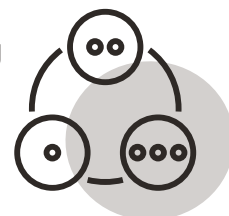


To attract jobseekers with disabilities, you can add the following statement to the job offer:

*This opening is available to persons with disabilities. We assure that any applicants will be evaluated solely on the basis of their qualifications. We encourage you to inform us in the application form of any accommodations you may need to enable you to reach our location and take part in the job interview.*

## Non-discrimination at every stage

Discrimination against people with disabilities may take place at any stage: not only during recruitment but also when the terms and conditions of employment are negotiated. It is vital to offer the same terms and conditions and career development opportunities to every employee. People with disabilities should be given equal promotion opportunities by providing clear advancement criteria and procedures and access to training to improve their qualifications. Whenever needed, the employer is obliged to provide reasonable accommodations unless their provision results in a disproportionate financial burden.



## 3 steps towards change

1. Remember that non-discrimination at every stage of employment is not optional: it is enshrined in the Civil Code.
2. Create a generally accessible non-discrimination document designed to prevent discrimination and promote it within your organisation.
3. Standardise your recruitment policy so that it is also applicable to persons with disabilities.





## **Małgorzata Lelińska, Deputy Director of European Funding at Konfederacja Lewiatan**



Employers tend to have many concerns as to whether their companies are prepared to employ people with disabilities. They falsely assume that designing procedures that ensure equal treatment and meeting the needs of employees with disabilities will be costly. Such misgivings are caused by the lack of reliable information. However, this can be remedied by taking advantage of free training. For starters, it is advisable to use any of the widely available guidebooks and tools, such as workplace accessibility pre-audits.

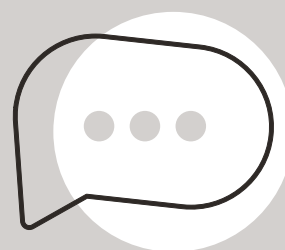
Employees' awareness of their rights and obligations associated with equal treatment is growing. Many of them increasingly assert their rights through litigation. A good recruitment process will protect a company not only against financial risks but also, and predominantly so, against the risk of harm to their reputation.

### **The case of an anonymous manager with a disability**

Eight years ago, after a very complicated recruitment process, I was employed as an assistant store manager. I started onboarding even before I signed my employment contract, and all was going well. About two weeks later, I was asked to provide my personal details for the contract. At that point, I informed my employer about my legally-disabled status. My supervisor was surprised and baffled. I was informed by the management that I should have disclosed my disabled status during recruitment.

A few days later, I received a notice of termination. The cause I was given was that the new store I was supposed to work at allegedly would not open. Needless to say, the store opened to plan. This only confirmed my initial suspicion that I was being discriminated against.

In hindsight, I am happy I did not get the job. I now realise that I am professionally destined to be in accounting rather than sales. Today, I thrive in a company that embraces diversity and appreciates the potential of people with disabilities.







**Paulina Gajda, Manufacturing Operations  
Manager at Dell Technologies**



We wanted to be prepared as best we could to work with people with hearing impairments. To that end, we conducted workshops to learn more about this disability. This helped our team become more aware. We try to use a whole range of ways to communicate – we write, use sign language, and show things to eliminate barriers. Since our employees are our most valuable asset, we do our best to build an environment in which people with disabilities will grow, perform at their best, and feel they belong in our organisation.



**Tomasz Dąbrowski, PhD, Founder and Vice  
President of Diversity Hub**

Many companies do nothing to embrace people with disabilities only because they do not want to get anything wrong. You cannot embrace disabilities through a single training course – it takes a well-thought-out consistent effort on the part of the entire organisation to get there. We believe that for a disability programme to be successful, it takes a change in narrative. We need to stop thinking in terms of us and them, the people with disabilities versus people without disabilities. We talk about us and a workplace for everyone.



# PRINCIPLE 3

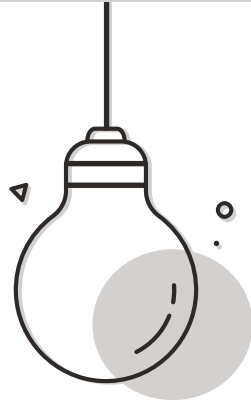
## Act multidimensionally!

### Equal treatment and equal opportunities



#### Imagine that...

A few years from now, a very loyal employee of yours grows older and becomes disabled. He asks for some changes that are important to him: shorter and flexible working time and support in communicating with the team. Although you are terrified at first, you realise that without these changes, you will lose a valuable team member. Given below is inspiring advice on how to build an equal opportunity culture in your organisation.



#### How to ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities?

##### During recruitment

- Create a **job ad template** detailing the job description and any obligatory and extra requirements. The job description should be detailed enough for the jobseekers with disabilities to be able to tell whether they will be able to cope.
- **Declare that your organisation is open** to people with disabilities. Remember that by failing to state your openness at the very beginning, you may deprive yourself of outstanding candidates. Use plain language and short sentences to be better understood.
- **Do not require a CV** unless it is essential for the recruitment process.
- Accept **multiple contact channels** (e-mail, phone, SMS, online application).
- Be open to a **whole range of forms of employment**: internships, full-time and part-time employment, remote work.
- Emphasise that during both the recruitment and actual employment, your organisation **will be happy to provide reasonable accommodations** if and where needed and possible. These, for example, can be recruitment materials suitable for people with impaired vision or more flexible working hours.





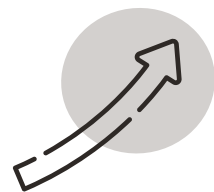
## During employment

- Provide appropriate **induction**. When inducting new workers with disabilities, focus on their **professional capacities**. If necessary, initially provide them with the support of another team member.
- **Encourage employees to signal their needs** by building a culture of openness to reasonable accommodations. Educate managers on how to address such requests promptly and how to communicate the company's decision denying a request.
- **Introduce flexible working time where possible**. This will give people with disabilities a chance to balance their work and personal life and attend to their health needs.
- **Encourage managers to arrange work schedules in advance and avoid assigning overtime**. Predictability is always helpful, not only to employees with disabilities.



## Career development

- **Where possible, evaluate work performance and outputs rather than how long it takes to complete tasks.**
- Provide **mentoring and training** to employees with disabilities. Such meetings will not only help integrate the team, but also show employees with disabilities how they can advance their careers and address any challenges.
- Provide workers with **access** not only to training but also to team-building activities, volunteering events, and co-worker birthday celebrations, whether on-site or on-line.
- **Do not make** presumptions – talk, ask, and give feedback making sure that work performance is fairly evaluated. If the performance is far from perfect, provide feedback by pointing out mistakes and ways to avoid them going forward (feedforward). Well-intentioned constructive feedback can inspire an employee to self-improve.
- **At work, we are all equal!** Disability does not justify leniency, especially where boundaries are overstepped or laws are broken.
- Set up an **Employee Resource Group**: a group of employees with disabilities to develop solutions to support, for instance, the reasonable accommodation policy or team diversity.



## 3 steps towards change

1. Make it clear that your organisation is willing to employ people with disabilities.
2. Be flexible in working with people with disabilities.
3. Foster self-improvement through training, mentoring, dialogue, and constructive feedback.



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**Monika Bentkowska, Country President  
& Human Resources Director Poland,  
Regional Diversity & Inclusion Director  
Continental Europe at Sodexo Polska**



We have been employing people with various disabilities, some of them intellectual, for more than 10 years. In addition to building awareness and developing skills in our team, we seek to include people with disabilities in the life of our organisation: we use simpler language in our onboarding training and communicate every internal accomplishment of our employees. We have practical cooking classes conducted by our chefs for people with mental disabilities to help them prepare for their first employment. We also seek to make our clients more comfortable with disability. We can see the results of our efforts and believe we can help make a world of equal opportunity for everyone.

**Barbara Bartczak, Project Director at Akademia  
Słońca Krzysztof Frąszczak**

For a person with disability, being active socially and professionally during an internship is an opportunity to prepare for employment in a particular profession or industry. For the employer, this is a great, cost-free way to test an intern's skills and experience in a real-life environment.



**Monika Chajdys, HR Manager at Truvant  
Europe Sp. z o.o.**



We employ people with disabilities in a variety of positions, including production and administration. During recruitment, we make every effort to learn as much as possible about our candidates and their needs. People with disabilities participate in our 'Career Paths' programme. One of them is Tomek, who is a person with a hearing impairment and who joined our company in 2018 as a Packaging Line Operator. He has since grown to become Machine Operator, and later Line Manager. He currently runs packaging lines by coordinating the work of diverse teams that also include people without hearing impairments.

# 4

## PRINCIPLE 4

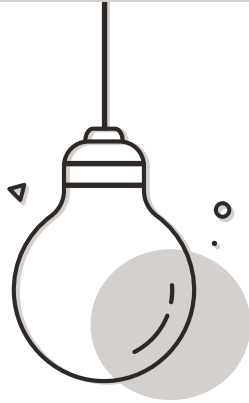
### Remove barriers

#### Accessibility



#### Imagine that...

You are recruiting a person for a job that requires special qualifications. You have a strong candidate who meets all the requirements but uses a wheelchair. Unfortunately, your company building is not adjusted to accommodate the needs of people with impaired mobility.



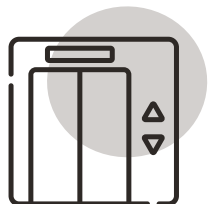
**Reasonable accommodations** involve making changes or adjustments to meet any specific needs of a person with a disability that have been brought to the employer's attention.



#### Why is ensuring accessibility for people with specific needs important?

A disability is not exclusively the problem of a person with a disability - it is a larger societal challenge. The key is to remove barriers to enable people with various needs to participate in social and professional life on the same terms as any others.

**By ensuring accessibility you show respect for human rights** and prepare your organisation for the inevitable, which is that, with the passage of time, you, your employees, and customers may require improved accessibility. Better access will benefit not only people with temporary injuries and the elderly but also persons with heavy luggage and baby strollers and even... couriers and delivery people.



#### Architectural audits of workstations

Your organisation will be well-advised to commission an external architectural audit of your workstations. Such an audit will provide you with detailed recommendations on how to improve accessibility and make adjustments. The auditor should consult people with various disabilities, including mobility, visual and hearing impairments, for their recommendations.

A useful part of the audit report is a workstation assessment showing whether people with disabilities will be able to do their jobs, what adjustments to make and which risks to look out for. This may be helpful for recruiters. Make sure to have no preconceived notions and to always ask prospective employees with disabilities about their needs.

If your organisation operates out of multiple locations, ask for additional recommendations to help you design new facilities or remodel any existing ones that have not been audited.



## **Architectural accessibility**

Architectural accessibility is an umbrella term that refers to all solutions that facilitate mobility in and around buildings such as ramps, handrails, wide hallways, marked passageways, properly designed toilets, no steps or thresholds. It is also vital to adjust workstations by providing e.g. screen magnification software for people with visual impairments or height adjustable desks and chairs for people with impaired mobility.

Having no elevator in your building should not be an excuse not to hire people with disabilities. If you are unable to adjust your whole building to accommodate people on crutches or in wheelchairs, adjust the ground floor and make them work there. Be open to people with disabilities and make your space accessible one step at a time. You can apply for PFRON (State Fund for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities) funding to adjust your working environment.

Include architectural accessibility information in your job ad. Be specific about any details that may be crucial to a job seeker with a disability such as 'there are 3 steps leading into the building' or 'work will take place on upper floor with no elevator access'. Let a person with a disability decide if they can work for you.

## **Digital accessibility**

The majority of disabilities do not prevent people from using computers and the Internet professionally. Such use is made possible by technological solutions such as screen readers for sightless people.

This is why you are well-advised to make sure that your websites and mobile applications comply with the WCAG 2.1 standard. The standard is available in Polish and contains numerous recommendations on how to make your web content more accessible to people with disabilities. The criteria it applies include content formatting, the contrast ratio, photos captions and video subtitles.



## Access to information and communication

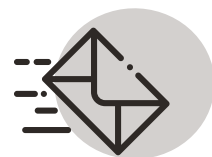
Consider providing communication to every person with a disability whether they are visiting your company or being approached remotely. You may do this by using such non-standard channels as e-mail or SMS or providing a Polish Sign Language (PJM) interpreter to people with hearing impairments (for instance during job interviews). Accessibility is crucial for both online and on-site events.

## Reasonable accommodations policy

The reasonable accommodations policy prioritises requests from the people who need adjustments to perform their job tasks. This will cut performance time and restore efficiency. As the majority of such requests will go directly to immediate supervisors, make sure your policy is widely circulated and that the procedure is clear.

It is good practice to set up a central budget to finance accommodations. In-house IT experts should keep close tabs on adjustments to the latest technologies. However, the people most knowledgeable about accommodations are those with disabilities. As many of them are already using tried and tested tools and devices, it is best to consult them on every solution.

Remember that people with legally-disabled status are a **diverse group**. The majority of them need no architectural or digital accommodations while the cost of many minor adjustments is negligible.



## 3 steps towards change

1. Note that architectural and digital accessibility is important in recruiting and employing people with disabilities, and that it also makes other people more comfortable.
2. An architectural audit of workstations provides guidelines to be followed step by step to make your organisation more accessible.
3. Your new website should be designed to comply with the WCAG 2.1 standard. This will make it more transparent and useful for everyone.



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## **Kamil Kowalski, Accessibility Designer, Executive at Integracja LAB**



Accessibility does not have to be costly. All one needs is to purchase a height-adjustable desk, a comfortable chair adjusted to the needs of a particular person, screen reading software for a visually impaired person, and a large-key keyboard for a person with a manual disability.

The next step is to design the workspace. Corporate offices are increasingly designed to allow employees to adjust their own posture, step away from their desks as often as possible, and change body positions. The fact of the matter is that workplace accessibility is a combination of many factors: architectural accessibility, adequate equipment, workstation organisation, proper procedures to govern company operations and an appropriate atmosphere and approach to employees.

## **Krzysztof Białoń, Member at Leżę i Pracuję (Lying on the Job)**

Glassouse glasses enable me to fully operate a computer: I can work, write, browse the Internet, pay bills online, watch movies, listen to music, and play games. The glasses are very easy to use. As I move my head to the left, the mouse cursor on screen moves to the left. The same principle applies to moving the cursor right, up, and down. To 'left click', I need to press a blue bite switch with my teeth/lips. Unfortunately, there is no right button, but I can substitute it easily with the on-screen keyboard and the 'Spikit' app.

Despite the fact that I cannot move even a finger (I have tetraplegia), the glasses have enabled me to get a job and advance my career. This technology allows me to perform practically every task involved in my work. With its help, I have managed corporate social media accounts and written multi-page articles. I currently work as a website administrator. The total I paid for the glasses, with charges, was roughly PLN 3000. This is very little considering the possibilities they offer!



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# 5

## PRINCIPLE 5

### Take care of your team

#### Employee retention



#### Imagine that...

You are a manager of a team of several people. Your team members vary in age. One day you are approached by your most senior subordinate. He informs you, as his direct supervisor, that he has been struggling with health issues and needs your support. What do you do?



#### How do you retain employees who acquire disabilities?

Note that preparing your organisation to work with people with disabilities **does not always mean employing new workers**. Your existing employees may acquire a disability not only with age, but also as a result of an accident or illness. According to the Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny), Poland's **population is ageing**. People with disabilities are the world's biggest and fastest-growing minority. This directly affects the labour market, which means you should start preparing your organisation now.

#### Employee retention and return-to-work programme

The employee retention and return-to-work programme provides standard ways in which **managers and HR officers should respond** to two scenarios. One of them concerns the employees who develop a disability with age. The other involves employees returning to work after a serious accident or injury that had left them temporarily unfit for work.

#### How can you support such employees?

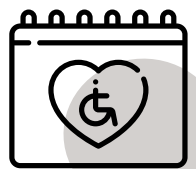
- Offer psychological support, mentoring or coaching.
- Arrange for them to see a career counsellor who can help them steer their careers within the organisation.



- If needed, offer an alternative position that better reflects their current capacities.
- Offer a pre-retirement scheme (the older workers who are allowed to retain full benefits while reducing their working time may be motivated to remain in employment).
- Make sure that supervisors are familiar with the organisation's policies such as the reasonable accommodation policy. A 2012 survey by Cornell University showed that employees **are 60% more likely to disclose their disability to their supervisor than to an HR officer.**

## The YES Declaration

The European Health Interview Survey in Poland (2014) reports that Poland is home to 7.7 million people with biological disabilities. This number may increase due in part to changing demographics. The majority of the people affected suffer from invisible limitations some of which are caused by civilisation diseases such as diabetes, asthma, and cardiovascular conditions. Given the sheer size of this group, **it may well be that your current employees are concealing their disabilities for fear of losing their jobs.** It is also in your interest to show you accept them. This in fact is the very purpose of our proprietary project: the 'YES Declaration'.



The project's goal is to create a policy of disability disclosure to HR for the benefit of both sides. For example, an employee can receive additional medical benefits or partial reimbursement of rehabilitation expenses. Meanwhile, the company can not only improve its image as an attractive employer, increase its share of workers with disabilities, and gain financial benefits but also reduce employee turnover.

Your responsibility as an employer is to make an effort to retain employees with acquired disabilities. However, if you notice that despite considerable support, such employees are not performing to expectations, termination may be the best option. Do not be afraid to make this decision, but before you do, offer the concerned employee a remedy programme. By doing so you will bolster the retention rate, which measures an employer's ability to retain employees.



## 3 steps towards change

1. Design an employee-retention and return-to-work programme for employees who acquire a disability due to ageing or injuries.
2. Say YES! Encourage your employees to disclose their disabilities or apply for legally-disabled status where medically justified.
3. Add the rate of retention to your company's key performance indicators.







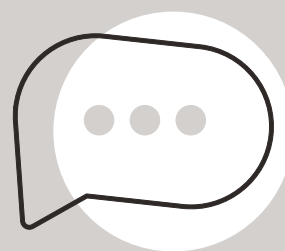
## **Bartosz Pałgan, Change Management Coach at TAKpełnosprawni Foundation**



A coach specialising in change management can support both employees and employers in dealing with acquired disabilities. When employees sustain damage to their health, their teammates usually cheer them on in their recovery although they may be concerned about whether the employees will be able to cope once they return to their old jobs. A significant change or even a fresh start may be necessary. In such situations, we recommend SPOCO coaching sessions. Additional support may come from our in-house career counsellor who can help the concerned employee find an alternative position in the company.

### **An anonymous employee with an acquired disability resulting from an accident**

My employer provided me with coaching sessions. That required my commitment and effort, but produced positive results. I got to believe that the outcome is entirely up to me and that every moment is right to change things for the better. All that is required is for you to be willing to change! The coaching helped me transition to a new job and change my everyday life. I found time for my passion and have become more optimistic and balanced.



### **Agnieszka Plet, CEO of the Poland Business Run Foundation**



Our role model is the employer of one of beneficiaries of Poland Business Run Foundation, Beata Wosiecka. In 2016, this 44-year-old woman lost her leg to cancer. Her employer, who up to that point had been very happy with her performance, adjusted her work area to her needs and offered her support in this difficult time. Beata continues to improve her qualifications. Her company, in its turn, has retained a well-tested loyal and satisfied employee. The support she received motivated Beata to help others. As a Support Coach at our Foundation, she looks after people who face the consequences of an amputation just like she did in the past.



# PRINCIPLE 6

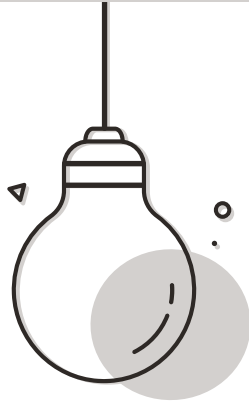
## Protect personal data

### Confidentiality



#### Imagine that...

You decide to employ a person with a disability who openly discusses her disability during recruitment. You do not consider this information confidential and let her legally-disabled status become the talk of the office. On turning up on her first day, the new employee immediately feels stigmatised. She wanted to be honest with you during recruitment, but did not wish for her disability to make her the centre of attention.



#### How to ensure confidentiality for people with disabilities?

Under the Polish law, **people with disabilities are not obliged to disclose their legally-disabled status**. Doing so should be a personal decision made in the comfort of guaranteed confidentiality. **This is not only about respecting the GDPR (personal data protection regulation) but also about a friendly work environment.** For this reason, it is crucial to draw up proper company documents that employees can anonymously look into to decide whether to disclose their legally-disabled status. As part of our 'YES Declaration' project, we run a hotline that employees can call to learn more about applying for such status without contacting the company's HR.

Some people living with invisible disabilities (such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases) openly discuss their disabilities provided they end up in a friendly working environment. However, not everybody is willing to share such information with other team members.

The supervisor does not need to know the medical and personal details of a person with a disability. His or her crucial role as manager is **to ensure decent working conditions for everyone.**



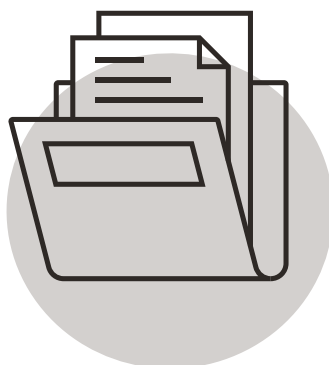
The key here is to ensure confidentiality in particular circumstances, and specifically:

- Throughout **recruitment**, regardless of its final result.
- When providing **reasonable accommodations**, particularly when other business units (such as IT or OHS in the case of ensuring digital access) are involved.
- When **applying for legally-disabled status**.
- As part of confidential **psychological support**. As employees with psychological disabilities tend to be highly stigmatised, many of them are reluctant to disclose their disabilities. However, health conditions such as depression and anxiety may lead to prolonged absences from work and lower efficiency. Support programmes benefit both employees and employers. They may offer a helpline and the help of on-site consultants. It is also helpful to educate supervisors in recognising the signs of psychological issues and supporting the workers who face them.



### 3 steps towards change

1. Ensure the confidentiality of personal data at every stage of employment: during recruitment, work proper and appraisal.
2. Secure anonymous support for every employee willing to apply for legally-disabled status.
3. Remember to provide confidential psychological support, in particular to people with psychological disabilities and employees going through psychological health issues.



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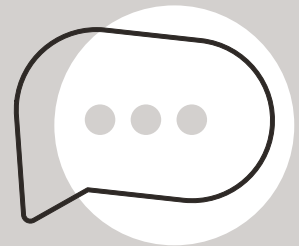


**Kinga Kaczmarczyk, Coordinator at Akme Foundation in DREWS Community Psychological Health Center, Career Coach**

Besides regular educational campaigns on psychological disorders, it is advisable to prepare a list of support institutions and share it through company channels. Such institutions include Community Mental Health Centres, a growing number of which are being established in Poland. They offer anonymous support to employees.

## **The anonymous employee with epilepsy**

I support the idea of disclosing your disability to your employer. This way the employer with our permission can prepare other team members to help us in the moment of crisis. As a result, we have a chance to function like employees without disabilities. A lot of people are very afraid of a disease beginning with E. Why? Lack of knowledge and fear. A simple conversation helps to realise many things.



**Kazimierz Romaniuk, Expert at TAKpełnosprawni Foundation**

Many employers ask whether having learned about an employee's disability they are allowed to include such information in a referral to an occupational physician. In our opinion, they should do so in the interest of the safety of the concerned person with a disability. The physician may also want to see a clear and detailed job description and a list of any relevant risk factors. This will help the physician make an informed decision.

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# PRINCIPLE 7

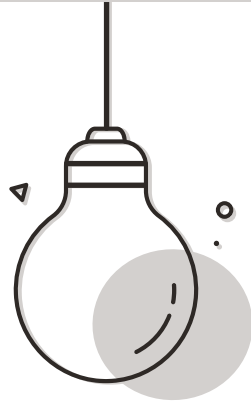
## Types of disabilities

### Gain a perspective



#### Imagine that...

People with disabilities vary in the particular challenges they face. Consider their needs to help them find employment or retain their position. On the other hand, by using the services of social organisations and supporting the employment of some people in a safe environment, you provide people with disabilities with employment not as an employer but as a client.



#### How to work with people with diverse disability backgrounds?

##### Give everyone a chance

People with intellectual disabilities are referred to as the true masters of simple tasks and may contribute a great deal by performing **less complicated work**. On entering the labour market, they are provided with free support of an **occupational trainer** whose job is to help them perform their work until they can get by with the support of a fellow team member alone (once such team member has been trained by a professional trainer).

Such support may also be crucial for people who have mental disabilities such as depression, phobias, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder. An appropriate work environment that is free of risk factors (such as high stress) as well as prevention, psychoeducation, and appropriately heeded warning signs allow people with disabilities to secure and stay in employment, and function on equal terms with other people.



Placed in a favourable environment, '**neuroatypical**' people have considerable performance potential. The term 'neuroatypical' refers to people whose neurological structure is different, which makes them experience reality in an alternative manner. Their way of perceiving the world is simply described as different from that of

neurotypical people. Neuroatypical refers to people on the autism spectrum, people with Asperger syndrome, dyslexia, and ADHD. Being assigned to smaller teams and given highly repetitive tasks, in an environment with fewer stimuli (e.g. flashing lights or loud noise), and provided with quality noise-suppression ear muffs, and access to a 'quiet room' may enable neuroatypical people to work effectively.

## Buy from social economy organisations

The mission of social organisations is to create jobs for people at risk of exclusion, including people with disabilities. The profit they generate goes to the professional and social reintegration of their employees and social causes. They typically take the form of social cooperatives, non-profit organisations, associations, and foundations that engage in business activities. According to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, Poland is home to over 1500 social enterprises.



How to use such organisations in your business practice? You can purchase products and services from social economy organisations to support the employment activation of people with disabilities, especially that **choosing this course of action does not mean selecting inferior products or services.**

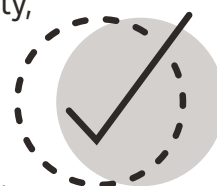
Social economy organisations successfully operate in the food service, cleaning, marketing, printing, construction and renovation industries. When searching for a social economy organisation, you may turn to the Social Economy Support Centres for a recommendation. There are currently 56 such centres across Poland, listed on [www.ekonomiaspoleczna.gov.pl](http://www.ekonomiaspoleczna.gov.pl).



## 3 steps towards change



1. Remember that if you need help with onboarding an employee with a disability, you may seek the support of an occupational trainer.
2. Note that being neuroatypical is not a disease but rather a different way of perceiving the world.
3. Become a customer of a social economy organisation, which you can support with your business.





## Justyna Schaefer-Kurkowiak, **Local Development and Partners Expert at Stowarzyszenie Centrum PISOP**

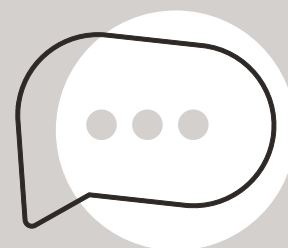


Social economy organisations operate in a variety of industries. If you are looking for a valuable gift for your customers, you may buy natural personalised soaps from Taka Mydlarnia run by the na TAK Association or eco-mesh banner bags from ZAZ Piła. There are also services you can use. The na Piątkę Social Cooperative of Grodzisk Wielkopolski runs a bakery. The KOSS Operative Social Cooperative offers cleaning services in the town of Kościan. Those are only some of the myriad of products and services available from socially responsible companies.

## An anonymous employee with bipolar disorder

I have Bipolar Affective Disorder. I have been professionally active for most of my adult life. I currently work in sales. This type of job involves a lot of stress. I have learned to balance my responsibilities and mental resilience levels to avoid psychological crises and absences from work. I am in regular contact with a psychiatrist, and when experiencing a rough time, I use the support of a crisis intervention worker.

My dedication to work, my work outcomes and the atmosphere I create make me a valued employee and a well-liked colleague. Having experienced psychological crises myself, I am well positioned to support my co-workers through psychological distress, which I do frequently.



## Alicja Dominiak, **Work Coach**

A work coach is crucial for adjusting work spaces to the needs of people with disabilities. Work coaches support both employees with disabilities and the whole team. They teach them how to define requirements for specific circumstances and how to communicate effectively. They conduct on-the-job and intervention training. Lasting results are achieved based on the value developed by the team rather than on the temporary support of a coach. We successfully conduct such projects e.g. at Starbucks and McDonald's.





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## **Kasia Modlińska, Founder & President of A/typical Foundation**



Employers in the US benefit greatly from employing neuroatypical people who make up over 20% of the population. Many such employees turn out to be much more productive. It is therefore well worth one's while to consider changes that may not be very difficult to adopt and can significantly improve the quality of a company's operations. Good examples include offering the option of remote job interviews, fixed working time, reduced sensory stimuli (many people prefer to avoid bright light, noise and the presence of too many people around them), and having team members prepared to work in a diverse team.

## **Marcin Szczepański, CEO of M.T.M. Sp. z o.o. sp. k. (sheltered workshop)**

In my view, the Zakład Pracy Chronionej (Sheltered Workshop) status is one of the best ideas for the professional activation of people with disabilities. M.T.M. provides funding for stays in rehabilitation centres and for purchases of critical rehabilitation equipment and medications. For many people, an away rehabilitation centre is the first chance ever to travel to the mountains or the seaside. We create teams consisting of people with and without disabilities who work together on a production line. Sharing tasks and goals helps them debunk many myths and break down prejudices.



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## **Ania Janiak, President of FIONA Foundation and FURIA Social Cooperative**



A substantial proportion of people on the neurodiversity spectrum are unable to find employment in the open job market. Many of them are highly sensitive or face a slew of other developmental challenges linked to concomitant diseases in addition to autism. This is precisely why social economy organisations, such as FURIA Social Cooperative, are created. For a number of years now we have been working with Volvo Firma Karlik of Poznań for which we make bags from advertising banners and used car seat belts, among other products. We are constantly on the lookout for ways to settle our business. To that end, we have co-founded the 'Klunkry Wielkopolskie' brand, run an online store and supported other social economy organisations.



# 8

## PRINCIPLE 8

### Work in groups

#### Cooperation

#### Imagine that...

You are seriously considering building a team of employees with diverse abilities. You look for information on that topic but having found yourself unable to identify businesses or other organisations with relevant experience, you choose to quit. This is what the world would look like if nobody shared good practices! Fortunately, this is not the case.



#### How and who to work with to build a diverse team?

To start with, you can share good practices with your **customers, business partners,** and **suppliers** (for example, when choosing a supplier, make sure to adhere to your diversity management policy). You might well inspire them to be inclusive and employ people with disabilities.

Then take your initiative a step further and **join other organisations** with prior experience building diverse teams.

#### What can you do?

- Participate in **meetings for companies** organised by our **TAKpełnosprawni Foundation**. This will be a great opportunity to share not only your experience but also your concerns and mistakes. Nothing helps make one comfortable with disabilities more than a credible story.
- Visit fairs, exhibitions and other **online** and **offline events** promoting cooperation with people with disabilities.
- Organise an **event** yourself or **sponsor** an initiative that promotes diversity. Don't forget to make it accessible for special-needs people.
- Recruit workers with the help of **non-governmental organisations**. Persons with



disabilities often approach such organisations looking for assistance in finding a job. Foundations and associations can not only help you in recruitment, but also in acquiring knowledge and preparing for change.

- Advocate for people with **a particular disability** also among your customers. They too may have employees who experience physical or psychological difficulties. Find an organisation that can help you deal with a particular challenge such as serving an autistic customer or designing a website for people with vision impairments.
- Establish cooperation with **networks of the employers** who employ people with disabilities. In Poland, this may be Polska Organizacja Pracodawców Osób Niepełnosprawnych (Polish Organisation of Employers of People with Disabilities). Internationally, you could turn to the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, which we have the pleasure to represent in Poland.
- Work with **vocational and other training centres and universities**. Almost every university maintains a unit dedicated to helping people with disabilities that may help you attract candidates with specific skills during their studies or shortly after they graduate. You can also cooperate with a school for people with disabilities and train your future employees.



### 3 steps towards change

1. Be open to cooperation and share your experiences with others.
2. To start with, find one organisation you can use as a model to be emulated. You may find it at meetings for companies organised by the TAKpełnosprawni Foundation.
3. Let global trends inspire you. One possible example to follow is the international ILO Global Business and Disability Network.



### Malwina Frydrychowicz, **ESG Strategy Manager** at Amica Group

To create a disabled-friendly workplace, it is essential to open up to various needs and be prepared to change one's organisation and work culture. I believe that this is best done with the support of expert organisations, such as TAKpełnosprawni, that specialise in bringing people with disabilities into the labour market. Such support will help you define relevant needs and adopt custom-made solutions to address them.





**Magdalena Grabowska, Discrimination Prevention and Diversity Management Coach and Expert, DEAF WORK Employment Agency at Łódź Branch of Polish Association of the Deaf**

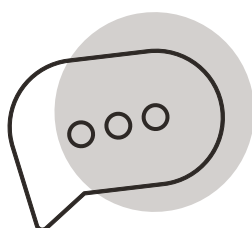


Note that being open to employees with disabilities requires openness to new customers who were previously unable to use your services. Our organisation offers services that support deaf and hard-of-hearing people. As an employment agency, we also help companies seeking to employ people with hearing disabilities by, for example, offering personalised courses of the Polish Sign Language, and supporting Polish Sign Language interpreters and video interpreters. In addition, we conduct workplace audits and training. Our 'Miasto Głuchych' (City of the Deaf) simulation game and the 'Employing and Working with People with Hearing Impairments' seminar have been the most popular so far, receiving the best reviews from the game users and seminar attendees.

**Małgorzata Grobelna, Advocacy Representative at JiM Foundation**



Adjustments for people with disabilities are adjustments for all of us. Business partners who are open to such adjustments are often the key to wider acceptance. Many of us dream about shopping in a quiet environment, with dim lights and more cash registers open. Lidl Polska, ALDI Polska, and Stokrotka supermarkets together with JiM Foundation have all introduced 'Quiet hours' in each of their stores in Poland. People on the autism spectrum can shop in an autism-friendly environment in the whole country. This action draws the attention of the entire society to the increasing acceptance of neurodiversity.



# PRINCIPLE 9

## Monitor results

### Evaluation



#### Imagine that...

You have been employing people with disabilities for many years and feel you have it well under control. The only problem is that you gauge your effectiveness on the basis of your presumptions while the actual condition of your diverse team is best measured with numbers.



#### How to track the effectiveness of cooperation in a diverse team?

##### Employment rate

Define the target ratio of people with disabilities you want to employ. Although numbers will not tell the whole story, they can give you a sense of how realistic your goal is over one or many years. Using such numbers will provide a clear reference for your entire organisation. Managers should then be evaluated on the progress they make towards your target and be accordingly rewarded for inclusive management.

A key indicator is the retention ratio, which is an employer's ability to retain employees, including those with disabilities. To learn more, see subchapter 5.

##### Anonymous satisfaction survey

Do you conduct annual anonymous employee satisfaction surveys? It is good to design them to compare the answers of employees with and without disabilities. Based on the responses of the former, you can learn how they feel in your organisation and what changes to introduce.



## Exit interview

Ask every employee with a disability leaving your team for the reason for their resignation. Was their team leader sufficiently supportive? Has the organisation provided reasonable accommodations? Did the employee feel appreciated as a fully-fledged member of the team?

## Job descriptions

Make sure that job descriptions do not needlessly exclude people with disabilities. For instance, an office job that additionally requires repeated bending to pick up objects may exclude such persons.



## Internal policies

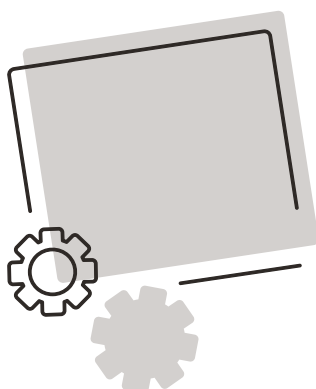
Just as you would with workstations, regularly assess and update internal documents on the inclusion of people with disabilities on your team. Such documents are described in subchapter 2 (non-discrimination/recruitment policy).



## 3 steps towards change



1. Define the ratio of people with disabilities you want on your team (e.g. within one or more years).
2. Monitor job satisfaction by means of anonymous surveys and exit interviews.
3. Regularly assess and update job descriptions and internal policies.



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## PRINCIPLE 10

### Share good practices

#### Knowledge



### Imagine that...

You already employ people with disabilities, are open to job seekers with legally-disabled status, and have significant experience building diverse teams. If you share this knowledge, you can improve your reputation and benefit the entire labour market.



### Where can you share knowledge on working with people with disabilities?

#### Internal and external communication

You can share information about:

- The share of people with disabilities employed in your organisation (e.g. in a social report).
- Any unique practices and initiatives in support of employing people with disabilities.
- Your corporate volunteering programme.
- Your support for social economy organisations.



Showcase the diversity of your teams on social media, your website, intranet, company catalogues, press advertisements, and any other available marketing channels.

The more details on your efforts you share, the sooner this valuable information will reach your prospective employees.

#### Social initiatives

Remember that you can submit your good practices free of charge for the '**Responsible Business in Poland. Good Practices**' report published by the Responsible Business Forum.

Another way to share your knowledge is to participate in the **'Pracodawca z Sercem'** ("Employer with a Heart") social campaign, whose main idea is to recognise the employers who work with people with disabilities. You might also join campaigns that focus on the everyday challenges of the people with disabilities. One of them, **'Polska Na Niebiesko'** (Light It Up Blue), is a public campaign designed to build the awareness of autism.



## Contests

By entering contests that focus on the employment and inclusion of people with disabilities, you will boost not only your image as an employer but also that of the entire community of socially responsible companies all the while encouraging its members to take similar actions. A good example of positive competition in Poland is the **'Lodołamacze'** (Icebreakers) contest.

Remember that regardless of the channel you choose to share your experience, your good practices will reach not only your prospective employees but also their families, friends, and all other socially responsible people. You will gain **natural and emotionally-invested ambassadors of your brand**.



## 3 steps towards change

1. Communicate your openness to people with disabilities internally and externally.
2. Submit your ideas and good practices for contests and reports.
3. Reach out to the natural ambassadors of your brand by consistent efforts to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities.





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**Marzena Strzelczak, President, General Director  
of the Responsible Business Forum**

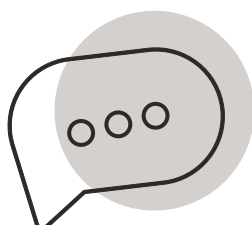
Initiatives pursued through partnerships with a potential to engage the biggest possible number of employees are particularly valuable. Companies increasingly search for opportunities to cooperate with foundations and associations in the recognition that cross-industrial partnerships benefit all the parties involved. One initiative that supports employers' advocacy for inclusiveness and social cohesion is the Diversity Charter (Karta Różnorodności), which in Poland is coordinated exclusively by the Responsible Business Forum (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu). A company that signs the Diversity Charter voluntarily commits not only to prevent discrimination in the workplace but also to strive for equal opportunity through recruitment and by promoting equal pay and employee development.



**Anna Węgrzynowicz, Organisation Director &  
Spokeswoman at Polish Organisation of Employers  
of People with Disabilities (Polska Organizacja  
Pracodawców Osób Niepełnosprawnych, POPON)**



The mission of 'Lodołamacze' (Icebreakers) is to break stereotypes and prejudices towards employing people with disabilities, integrate them, provide them with opportunities to fully participate in social life, encourage employers to create new jobs for employees with disabilities, and improve the quality of existing positions. We hope that the idea of this competition will reach and interest any employers who have not yet considered hiring people with disabilities. In the 15 years that have elapsed since the competition was first launched, over 3050 companies participated in this initiative.



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## Report summary

# 10 key takeaways



### 1. People with disabilities constitute a significant group

People with disabilities are present in our lives. We do not always realise this as many of their disabilities are invisible. And yet, employers cannot ignore such an important segment of the population whether as a source of prospective workers or as the customers who need tailored adjustments.

### 2. We are the same at the workplace

People with disabilities should (and want to) be treated in the same way as any person without disability. The key is for both sides to respect their mutual rights. This applies to scopes of responsibility, career paths, and remuneration.

### 3. We all need to continue our education

Asked about the development barriers they face, both employees and employers point to the lack of knowledge/experience and the fear of lower efficiency. Training and opportunities to share experience can be very helpful for both groups.

### 4. The first step is to declare openness

Both sides should show initiative. Employers may communicate that they welcome people with disabilities while job seekers should actively look for employment and improve their qualifications (also with the help of non-governmental organisations).

### 5. Reasonable accommodations are not always necessary

Many people with disabilities do not require expensive reasonable accommodations. What they need is a team that is welcoming of diversity and promotes wise, inclusive management on the part of its leaders. Reasonable accommodations can be beneficial for all employees while increased accessibility can open the door to new customers.

## 6. Failures to disclose disabilities harms everyone

Failures to disclose a disability may not only undermine worker health and safety but also cause workplace culture to deteriorate. It is therefore crucial to build a policy of equal opportunity for everyone's benefit.

## 7. Disability does not exclude one from labour market

No legally-disabled status bars people with disabilities from employment. It is up to the occupational physician to make the final determination as to whether an employee is fit for work. In many cases, reasonable accommodations and social economy organisations can support an employee's professional activation.

## 8. Diversity improves relationships

Diversity fosters empathy and creativity in team members. Openly talking about disabilities will build honest and transparent relationships and provide every employee with a sense of security.

## 9. Non-discrimination is mandated by law

Discrimination is illegal. People with disabilities may sue employers for failing to abide by this rule even if the employer's behaviour resulted from poor awareness or inadequate knowledge. It is therefore advisable to educate oneself and adopt equal opportunity policies and fair recruitment and performance appraisal criteria.

## 10. Open labour market is our joint purpose

Everyone will grow old and may acquire a disability with age. By building diverse teams, we are in fact investing in our own future in the job market.

### For employers

We realise that the number of actions we have suggested may be overwhelming but you do not need to adopt them all at once. Instead, take small steps and steadily increase the number of people who support this initiative within your organisation. Do so and you will see the project becoming a great opportunity for the growth of your organisation rather than a burdensome duty. And remember: our Foundation is here to support you!



# TAKpełnosprawni Foundation

The TAKpełnosprawni Foundation promotes the employment and inclusion of people with disabilities in the open labour market. Our organisation was established to support two groups that are important to us: the people with disabilities who look for employment and informed employers willing to build diverse teams. We put wind in the sails of job-seekers and fight the stereotypes that persist in Polish companies.

Our goal is to ensure that our candidates end up in informed organisations. Therefore, every organisation that wants to work with us and bring people with disabilities into their structures undergoes a verification process. If needed, the organisation receives our support.

We represent the ILO Global Business and Disability Network in Poland. The Network is an international forum in which business and other organisations share their practices and work together for the cause of increasing the presence of people with disabilities in the open labour market. If your organisation wishes to become a part of this initiative, join us.

## What sets us apart?

**We believe** that all of us, regardless of our abilities, have specific strengths and capabilities. Our focus is to discover every person's potential and provide them with opportunities to grow in a diverse team.

**We know** we are one of the world's fastest ageing populations and that everyone can suffer from an age-related or other acquired disability. Therefore, we fight for a more accessible, open world for everybody, including ourselves.

**We care** for employees with disabilities. We have designed a unique Deklaracja na TAK (YES Declaration) programme and recommend its use to every responsible employer who cares for the comfort and safety of its employees.

**We are aware** of the physical and mental barriers faced by people with disabilities and appreciate their dedication and loyalty.

**The TAKpełnosprawni Foundation was founded in 2020.** Previously, this project was run for over a decade as an internal initiative of Job Impulse. With time, the idea evolved to the point where we chose to establish an independent non-profit organisation in its charge. Now we can do even more!



# Our Partners



We wish to thank our Partners for their support in promoting our survey and producing this report. Special thanks are due to the Job Impulse team, and in particular to Aleksandra Bauza, for their invaluable help in conducting the survey and preparing this report.

Substantive supervision over the 'Pracodawca na TAK' survey has been extended by Professor Alina Zajadacz of the Faculty of Geographical and Geological Sciences at Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznań.

# We look forward to working with you

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Poznan, September 2021