

INCLUSIVE EVOLUTION 2023

HANDBOOK ON EMPOWERMENT



INEVO

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Introduction

Welcome to the Handbook for Empowerment! Within these pages, you will find a wealth of information, resources, and practical tips to help develop and enhance the crucial skills that will make you more competitive in today's workforce. We recognize that empowerment extends beyond accessibility—it is about fostering personal growth, self-confidence, and the belief that you have the ability to succeed.

This comprehensive handbook is designed to empower and equip young individuals, including those with visual impairments and minor motor disabilities, with the essential soft skills and competencies necessary to thrive in the competitive labor market.

Through inspiring stories, informative policies, legislation, educational programs, inclusion strategies, available learning materials and courses, and best practices from Europe, this handbook will assist you in honing your communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills. It will provide guidance on navigating the job search process, crafting an impressive resume, preparing for interviews, and leveraging your unique strengths to stand out from the competition.

We firmly believe that every young person deserves the opportunity to unlock their potential, cultivate their talents, and become more competitive in the labor market. By embracing the tools and knowledge shared in this handbook, you will embark on a transformative journey of skill development, self-discovery, and limitless possibilities.

Together, let us redefine what it means to be empowered in today's fast-paced and competitive world. By equipping yourself with the necessary soft skills and competencies, you will position yourself for success and seize the opportunities that await you in the labor market.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Handbook, along with its corresponding methodology, serves as the initial output of the third work package within the Civil Society Cooperation 2023 project titled "Inclusive Evolution 2023" (InEvo 2023), led by [Asociatia Babilon Travel \(1\)](#) Romania. It aims to provide a collection of effective approaches and good practices, activities, and tools for enhancing soft skills, increasing competitiveness in the labor market, and fostering employability.

The primary objective of this handbook and methodology is to gather comprehensive European-level information on youth empowerment through the development of soft skills specifically tailored for the labor market. While the handbook predominantly focuses on young individuals with visual impairments, it also addresses other minor disabilities.

The corresponding methodology involves conducting thorough desk research to establish a framework encompassing good practices, activities, policies, and inclusive strategies to empower youth with disabilities in Europe, and globally.

This methodology holds significant innovative value as it concentrates on empowering visually impaired and blind youths, emphasizing the cultivation of soft skills essential for the labor market and improved employability. The intention is for stakeholders, such as visually impaired and blind youngsters, caregivers, non-profit organizations, educators, public institutions, and the business sector, to utilize this methodology in developing appropriate activities, projects, and strategies that promote and sustain youth empowerment and employability.

After evaluating the situation in Europe, the overall conclusion drawn from this study/handbook is that there are evident challenges and barriers concerning the employment of visually impaired youth. Furthermore, the development of their soft skills and competencies is often overlooked or dismissed based on the assumption that they cannot succeed. Consequently, prioritizing their empowerment becomes imperative in today's society. It is our responsibility to create and cultivate adapted opportunities that answer to their unique needs.

1 - [Asociatia Babilon Travel](#)



INTRODUCTION ON THE INEVO 2023 PROJECT

2.1 Overall Description of the Project

With a grand vision of embracing the unique perspectives we all hold in our world, Babilon Travel NGO started its life in 2013 and embarked on a mission to promote social inclusion among young individuals facing fewer opportunities.

For Babilon Travel, the opportunity to develop this 2023 project signifies a chance for growth and improvement in their activities. It aligns perfectly with its vision and primary objectives: the personal and professional development of young people, both with and without fewer opportunities, primarily those facing disabilities. Babilon Travel NGOs also aim to empower youth participation, enhance the quality of youth work, and promote inclusion. Since 2021, the organization have placed increased emphasis on sustainability and digital transformation.

Within this project, Babilon Travel plans to coordinate and implement approximately ten activities, in addition to the mobilities offered by other projects. These endeavors serve to support their overarching goals for 2023. The activities themselves are designed to develop and enhance various skills and competences, such as utilizing non-formal education methods and tools, understanding the needs of young individuals with disabilities or fewer opportunities, employing sports as an educational tool for inclusion, creating activities adapted to the needs of disabled youth, fostering self-empowerment and self-esteem, promoting intercultural dialogue, nurturing multilingual skills, building social links and networks, and gaining knowledge about the Erasmus+ Programme, Youthpass, and key competences.

Babilon Travel's primary target group for 2023 encompasses young individuals, both with and without fewer opportunities, particularly those facing disabilities. Additionally, they aim to engage youth workers and decision-makers. The impact of their project in 2023 will extend not only to their partners with whom they currently collaborate but also to new organizations joining their European network.



2.2 Objectives

Youth empowerment is important in fostering a brighter future for our society. It is about equipping young individuals with the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to realize their full potential and make a positive impact on the world. This holds true for all youth, including those with visual impairments or other disabilities.

For visually impaired youngsters, empowerment means ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in education, employment, and everyday experiences.

Babilon Travel NGO since the very beginning encouraged the empowerment and soft skills development of visually impaired young people through all of its projects, activities, and mobilities. In the last years, focused also on increasing employability among visually impaired and blind youngsters.

The InEvo 2023 project aims to continue this tradition with more force and motivation toward an inclusive, accessible society where young people with disabilities can develop and improve their competencies without barriers, which will help them be more competitive in the labor market.

InEvo 2023 project has some general and specific objectives.

We can mention among them general objectives: social inclusion of marginalized youth; support youth workers to develop quality activities based on equality, equity, inclusion, access to education, culture, democracy, and human rights; strengthening youth work in an inclusive context over Europe.

And specific objectives: promote across our international network of partners, a learning platform already used in many cities/regions, not only in Europe but in the entire world (Cities/Regions of Learning); create a link between the educational service providers and the disabled and non-disabled youngsters in search for such services; promote Open Badges as tools of recognition of non-formal learning outcomes; increase our European Network of partners and continue to develop its cross-sectorial dimension; removing barriers to active and equal participation of disabled youngsters and youngsters with fewer opportunities in public life and to combat discrimination.

2.3 Expected Results

During the entire project lifetime (2023-2025) there are expected the following results and outcomes:

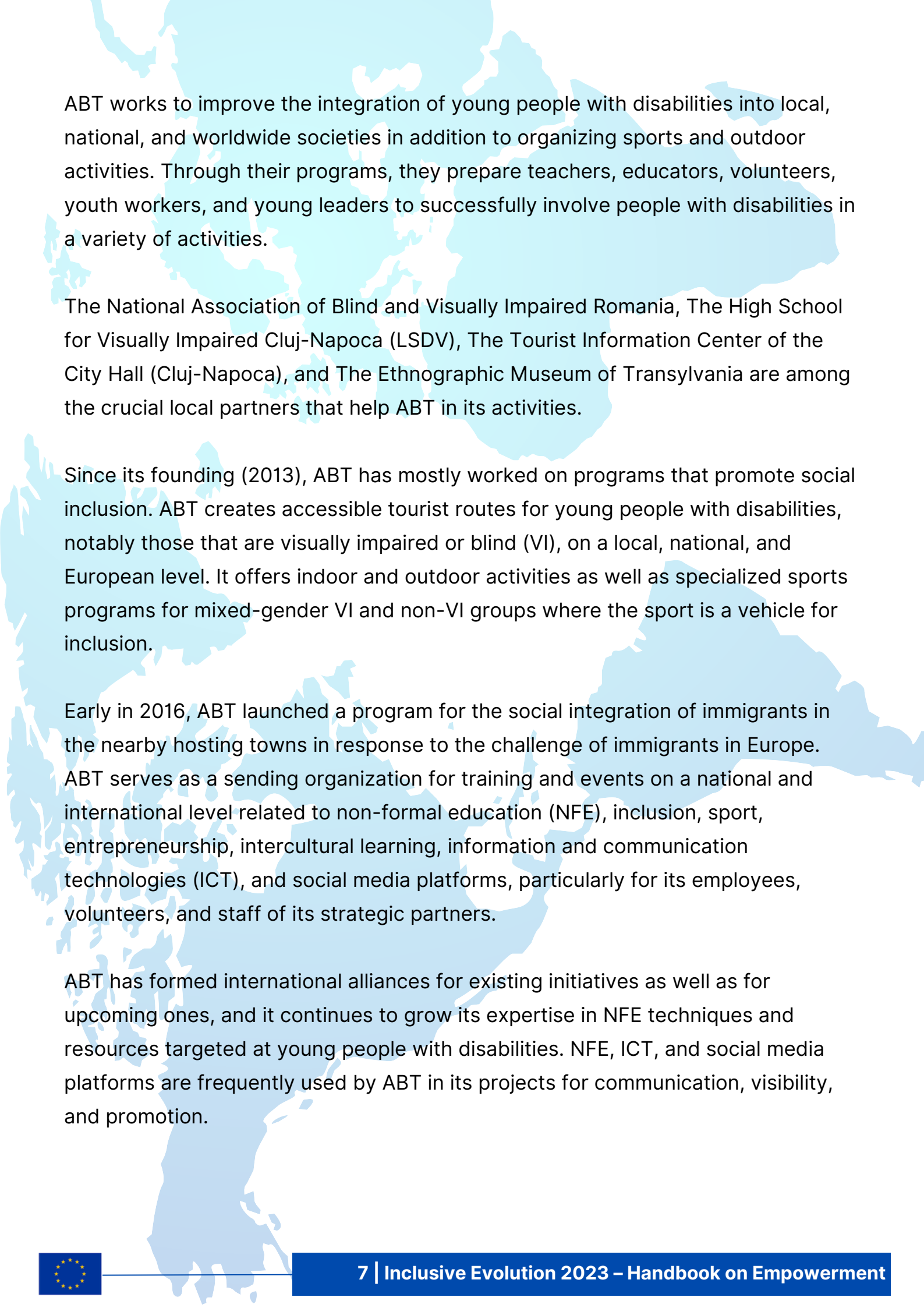
- Innovative approaches for addressing blind youngsters or those with visually impaired target groups, by providing more attractive nonformal education and training programs, in line with individual needs and expectations.
- Support the capacity building of youngsters with visual impairment.
- Use of participatory approaches and ICT-based methodologies.
- New or improved practices to cater to the needs of the disadvantaged.
- Integrated good practices and new methods into daily activities.
- Reinforced cooperation with partners from other countries, other fields of non-formal education, safety in traveling, training, and other socio-economic sectors.
- Greater understanding and responsiveness to social diversity.
- More active participation of visually impaired/blind youngsters in society.
- Increased motivation and satisfaction in living and traveling for visually impaired/blind youngsters.
- Foster the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Unlike other projects we have carried out so far or have heard of, some of these projects' outputs will be tangible, open, and transparent, covering a broad range of topics, available to all people that are interested in mobilities, with the biggest accent to visually impaired youngsters.

2.4 Asociația Babilon Travel Romania

[Asociația Babilon Travel \(ABT\) \(2\)](#) is the coordinator of the Inclusive Evolution project.

Young people with disabilities and those with less opportunity are the focus of Asociația Babilon Travel (ABT), which is committed to fostering inclusiveness, intercultural discussion, and adaptive sports as effective tools for active citizenship in Europe. ABT also place a high priority on ecotourism, rural tourism, sustainable tourism, and the preservation of Romanian customs and handicrafts, with a focus on Cluj-Napoca and Transylvania in particular. Creating accessible tourist routes with a focus on young people with disabilities is one of their major goals.



ABT works to improve the integration of young people with disabilities into local, national, and worldwide societies in addition to organizing sports and outdoor activities. Through their programs, they prepare teachers, educators, volunteers, youth workers, and young leaders to successfully involve people with disabilities in a variety of activities.

The National Association of Blind and Visually Impaired Romania, The High School for Visually Impaired Cluj-Napoca (LSDV), The Tourist Information Center of the City Hall (Cluj-Napoca), and The Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania are among the crucial local partners that help ABT in its activities.

Since its founding (2013), ABT has mostly worked on programs that promote social inclusion. ABT creates accessible tourist routes for young people with disabilities, notably those that are visually impaired or blind (VI), on a local, national, and European level. It offers indoor and outdoor activities as well as specialized sports programs for mixed-gender VI and non-VI groups where the sport is a vehicle for inclusion.

Early in 2016, ABT launched a program for the social integration of immigrants in the nearby hosting towns in response to the challenge of immigrants in Europe. ABT serves as a sending organization for training and events on a national and international level related to non-formal education (NFE), inclusion, sport, entrepreneurship, intercultural learning, information and communication technologies (ICT), and social media platforms, particularly for its employees, volunteers, and staff of its strategic partners.

ABT has formed international alliances for existing initiatives as well as for upcoming ones, and it continues to grow its expertise in NFE techniques and resources targeted at young people with disabilities. NFE, ICT, and social media platforms are frequently used by ABT in its projects for communication, visibility, and promotion.



ASSESSMENT ON THE RESEARCH

3.1 Youth Empowerment in the 21st Century

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told leaders and dignitaries at High-Level Event on the Demographic Dividend and Youth Employment “The world now has the largest generation of young people in history. I place great hope in their power to shape our future”. (3)

In the 21st century, youth empowerment has emerged as a crucial aspect of creating a better future for our society. Empowering young individuals, and equipping them with the necessary skills, resources, and opportunities, is essential for their personal growth, development, and meaningful engagement in shaping the world around them.

The process of incorporating young people into a community's decision-making is known as youth empowerment. Youth can use this opportunity to make their voices heard and become aware of their power as they come to the awareness that they have a voice that the community should pay attention to. (4)

Youth empowerment encompasses a wide range of dimensions. It involves fostering self-confidence, encouraging critical thinking, promoting leadership skills, nurturing creativity, and enhancing problem-solving abilities. It is about providing platforms for young individuals to express their voices, ideas, and aspirations, and ensuring that their opinions are valued and heard.

For youngsters with disabilities, particularly those who are visually impaired or blind, youth empowerment holds even greater significance. It is a means of breaking down the barriers and stereotypes that limit their opportunities for growth and inclusion. By empowering these young individuals, we enable them to transcend the limitations imposed by their disabilities and recognize their vast potential.

Empowering visually impaired or blind youth starts with providing access to quality education that is tailored to their needs. It involves ensuring that educational institutions are equipped with the necessary tools, technologies, and trained educators to support their learning. By fostering inclusive educational environments, we enable visually impaired or blind youngsters to acquire knowledge, develop skills, and prepare for future opportunities.

3 - [Youth empowerment, education, employment key to future development - Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth](#)

4 - [The Importance of Youth Empowerment—and How Childhope Heeds the Call](#)



Moreover, empowerment for visually impaired or blind youth extends beyond the educational sphere. It involves creating inclusive employment opportunities, where their skills and talents can be recognized and valued. This requires working with employers to promote accessibility, adapt workplaces, and provide assistive technologies to facilitate their active participation in the labor market.

Additionally, empowerment entails challenging societal attitudes and perceptions towards disabilities. It involves promoting awareness, empathy, and acceptance among the wider community. By fostering an inclusive and accessible society, we create an environment where visually impaired or blind youth can participate fully in social, cultural, and recreational activities, without facing discrimination or exclusion.

Through empowerment, visually impaired or blind youth gain a sense of independence, autonomy, and self-worth. They are equipped with the tools to advocate for their rights, express their needs, and actively contribute to decision-making processes that affect their lives. Youth empowerment enables them to become agents of change, shaping a society that embraces diversity, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all.

3.2 Methodology

The methodology for creating the "Handbook on Empowerment" involved conducting comprehensive desk research on various websites and platforms related to youth work, social inclusion, youth policies, employability, and other relevant topics. This research aimed to gather valuable information, insights, and best practices that will inform the development of the handbook and ensure its effectiveness in empowering young individuals.

The desk research process began by identifying key websites, online platforms, academic journals, research papers, policy documents, and reputable sources that specialize in youth empowerment, social inclusion, and related areas. These sources may include international organizations, government agencies, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and renowned experts in the field.

By exploring these resources, the research team gained access to a wealth of knowledge and expertise. They analyzed and synthesized the information obtained, focusing on key themes and concepts relevant to youth empowerment on the European level in general, touching as well the situation of persons with disabilities on a national level (Romania).

These themes may encompass developing soft skills, enhancing employability, fostering social inclusion, promoting diversity, and addressing the specific needs of young individuals with disabilities, including visual impairments.

The research process involved examining case studies, success stories, and innovative approaches implemented in various contexts and regions. It also included reviewing youth policies, programs, and initiatives that have demonstrated positive outcomes in empowering young individuals and promoting their active participation in society.

Additionally, the research team explored different methodologies, tools, and strategies employed in the field of youth work to facilitate empowerment and social inclusion. This may include non-formal education methods, mentorship programs, peer support networks, career guidance, leadership development, and capacity-building initiatives.

Throughout the desk research, the team critically evaluated the reliability, relevance, and applicability of the gathered information. They cross-reference multiple sources to ensure the accuracy of the data and strive to include diverse perspectives and experiences.

Based on the findings from the desk research, the team then proceeded to develop the "Handbook on Empowerment." This handbook aims to provide practical guidance, activities, and strategies that enable youth, youth workers, educators, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders to effectively empower young individuals. It encompasses a range of topics, including skill development, employment readiness, inclusive practices, and specific considerations for individuals with disabilities, such as visual impairments.

During the years of activities, many of our beneficiaries provided information and suggestions that were used in the desk research.

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\) \(5\)](#), efforts are being made to better include young people with disabilities in society, development, and the fulfillment of their human rights. All adolescents, including those with disabilities, must be given equal opportunity to engage in and contribute to society at all levels as nations continue their efforts to reduce poverty and promote equitable development.

[Unicef \(6\)](#) in 2013, stated that even in industrialized nations, young people with

5 - [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

6 - <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/youth-with-disabilities.html>



disabilities are among the most excluded and impoverished in the world and are more likely to experience severe social, economic, and civic inequities. Exclusion, isolation, and abuse, along with a lack of educational and employment prospects, are commonplace experiences for many young people with disabilities.

3.3 Statistical data

Due to a variety of circumstances, including stigma and inaccessible locations, youth with disabilities frequently experience marginalization and substantial social, economic, and civic disadvantages when compared to those without impairments. It is crucial to guarantee that all youth, including those with disabilities, have equal opportunities to become productive and contributing members of their society and enjoy all rights and privileges of citizenship as countries look to the post-2015 era to ensure poverty reduction and equitable development.

According to the World Bank one billion people, or 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability, and disability prevalence is higher for developing countries.

Youth with disabilities, who number more than 200 million globally, continue to be marginalized in terms of socioeconomic inclusion.

Disability-inclusive development is becoming more widely known. The complete integration of people with disabilities into society is encouraged by the 185 nations that have joined the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The relevance of international development in addressing the rights of people with disabilities is particularly mentioned in the CRPD.

The European Blind Union (EBU) states that blind and partially sighted Europeans are undoubtedly among the most vulnerable and least visible members of society. For the most part they are at the bottom end of the earnings league.

In 2019, EBU carried out a study, "The situation of blind and partially sighted people regarding employment in Europe after 10 years of the UN CRPD : Challenges and opportunities" led by our Spanish member, ONCE, where made a cross-analysis of employment in Europe.

7 - [YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES](#)

8 - [Disability Inclusion Overview](#)

9 - [Facts about Disabilities & Inclusion We Learned from Youth in the Arab Region | United Nations Development Programme](#)

10 - [European Blind Union](#)

11 - [once - report on the situation of blind and partially sighted persons regarding employment in europe](#)



Article 27, paragraph 1 of the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), (12) obligates States Parties to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others. It states that the right of persons with disabilities to work includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labor market and work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible to persons with disabilities, and sets out a non-exhaustive list of appropriate steps for States Parties to take, including through legislation, to safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work in European countries.

There are four times as many partially sighted persons as blind persons. The average unemployment rate among blind and partially sighted persons of working age is over 75 percent. More women are unemployed than men. (13)

People with disabilities are more likely to work in low-paying positions at lower occupational levels, with fewer advancement opportunities, and under unfavorable working conditions. They frequently hold temporary or part-time occupations with limited possibility for career advancement. The difficulties that persons with disabilities encounter in this respect are frequently connected to unfavorable views or opinions, ingrained stigmas and stereotypes, and a lack of attention on the part of authorities, employers, and the general public. Another significant impediment is a lack of access to education and training in labor-market-relevant skills. (14)

3.4 European Legislation

European legislation on youth with disabilities empowerment encompasses several key frameworks and instruments that aim to promote the rights, inclusion, and empowerment of young individuals with disabilities. Some notable legislative initiatives include:

1. [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#) (15): Although not specific to Europe, the UNCRPD is a crucial international human rights treaty that has been ratified by all European Union member states. It emphasizes the rights and empowerment of persons with disabilities, including youth, and calls for their full and effective participation in society.

12 - [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

13 - [European Blind Union](#)

14 - [once - report on the situation of blind and partially sighted persons regarding employment in Europe](#)

15 - [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | OHCHR](#)



2. [European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 \(16\)](#): This strategy, adopted by the European Commission, sets out the framework for disability policies in the European Union. It addresses various aspects of disability rights and empowerment, including education, employment, accessibility, social inclusion, and independent living.

3. [European Pillar of Social Rights \(17\)](#): The European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by the European Union in 2017, includes principles and rights aimed at promoting social inclusion and empowerment, including for persons with disabilities. It emphasizes equal opportunities, access to education, and support for people with disabilities to participate fully in society and the labor market.

4. [European Union Disability Strategy 2021-2030 \(18\)](#): Building on the previous disability strategy, the European Union has adopted a new strategy to guide disability policies and actions in the next decade. This strategy aims to promote the rights, inclusion, and empowerment of persons with disabilities, including young people, across various policy areas, including education, employment, accessibility, and social protection.

5. [Erasmus+ Program \(19\)](#): The Erasmus+ Program of the European Union provides funding and support for various mobility and educational initiatives, including those targeting young individuals with disabilities. It promotes inclusive education, vocational training, youth exchanges, and volunteering opportunities that contribute to the empowerment and social inclusion of young people with disabilities.

These legislative initiatives provide a framework for promoting the rights and empowerment of youth with disabilities in Europe. They emphasize the importance of inclusive education, equal opportunities, accessibility, and social inclusion across various domains of life.

16 - [European Commission, European Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#)

17 - [European Pillar of Social Rights - EASPD](#)

18 - [European Disability Strategy 2021-2030 - Knowledge Hub - Social Services](#)

19 - [Erasmus+](#)



Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (the Employment Equality Directive), which forbids discrimination, among other things, on the basis of disability in the field of employment and vocational training, was adopted based on article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

The Directive forbids any discrimination, whether direct or indirect, on a number of grounds, including disability, in the areas of employment, vocational training, salary, and working conditions. It also forbids membership in groups of workers or employers.

By December 2006, member states of the European Union had to enact national legislation to ensure that the Directive was being followed.

Unfortunately, the directive has not yet been fully implemented across all nations on an equal footing.

The priority at the national level is still to ensure that this legislation is enforced and used by people with disabilities who have experienced prejudice. It is a rather effective and powerful tool. (20)

European legislation for youth with disabilities on empowerment and employability is crucial for several reasons:

1. Protection of Rights: These legislations ensure that the rights of young individuals with disabilities are recognized and protected. They provide a legal framework to safeguard against discrimination, inequality, and exclusion, promoting equal opportunities and full participation in society.
2. Inclusive Education: European legislations emphasize inclusive education, ensuring that young people with disabilities have access to quality education on an equal basis with their peers. This promotes their cognitive, social, and vocational development, preparing them for future employment opportunities.
3. Employment Opportunities: The legislations aim to remove barriers to employment and promote equal access to the labor market for young people with disabilities. They encourage employers to provide reasonable accommodations, support inclusive recruitment practices, and combat discrimination in the workplace. This increases the chances of young individuals with disabilities finding meaningful and sustainable employment.

4. Economic Empowerment: By enabling youth with disabilities to enter the workforce, these legislations contribute to their economic empowerment. Employment provides individuals with financial independence, enhances their self-esteem, and reduces their dependency on social welfare systems.

5. Social Inclusion: The legislations foster social inclusion by promoting the active participation of young people with disabilities in society. By empowering them to engage in employment and contribute to their communities, these legislations challenge negative stereotypes and promote a more inclusive and accepting society.

6. Skills Development: European legislations emphasize the development of skills and competencies among youth with disabilities. This includes promoting soft skills, vocational training, and access to lifelong learning opportunities. Such skill development enhances their employability and increases their chances of successful integration into the labor market.

7. International Cooperation: These legislations contribute to international cooperation and collaboration among European countries. They provide a common framework and guidelines for addressing the challenges faced by youth with disabilities across different nations, fostering sharing of best practices, research, and policy development.

Overall, European legislations on youth with disabilities empowerment and employability are important as they ensure the protection of rights, promote equal opportunities, facilitate inclusive education, increase employment prospects, foster economic and social empowerment, and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

3.5. Young people with disabilities in Romania

According to Ministry of Labor and Special Protection Report on Situation Diagnosis of People with disabilities in Romania (2021) (21), people with disabilities should be adequately trained to increase their skills and develop their competences, and their creative and productive potential. Labor market education and training should increase the attractiveness of people with disabilities to employers, be accessible to both inactive and unemployed people with disabilities and to people in employment who want to change jobs or improve their performance in their current job. Additional training is important to capitalize on the skills and talents of people with disabilities and be tailored.

21 - [Ministerul Muncii](#)

The benefits of employing an inclusive workforce are felt on many levels:

1. At the individual level, employment leads to increased personal autonomy, increased well-being, and a lower risk of dependency on social benefits.
2. At the employer level, employing people with disabilities creates a diverse workforce, reflecting the diversity of the customers and communities in which businesses operate and attracting additional skills to firms.
3. At a societal level, the employment of people with disabilities leads to the creation of a diverse workforce, with an additional contribution to GDP and reduced unemployment benefit costs, and some social protection benefits.

The 2019 national report "Employment of people with disabilities - a response to the labor shortage" (22) (PRO-Pact) shows that in Romania there is a phenomenon extremely bizarre: at the moment no institution is collecting data and information on the employment of people with disabilities, neither the ANPD nor the National Agency for Employment, nor the Labor Inspectorate. Partial data can be only found at the National Tax Administration Agency, but only on request. In Romania, people with disabilities have limited support to get a job independent work, and to access the labor market. Support for people mainly focuses on providing healthcare and less on support for people with disabilities. developing independent living skills. Children with disabilities have limited access to preschool facilities and drop out of school twice as often as other children.

In Romania, according to the statistical report for the fourth quarter of 2018, prepared by the [National Authority for Persons with Disabilities](#), (23) as of 31 December 2018, Romania had 823,956 persons with disabilities, of which 50.67% were aged 18-65 (approx. 417,558 persons). Only 30,271 people were employed on 31.01.2019, according to data provided by the National Agency for Tax Administration, i.e., about 7.25%, well below the European average of 52-54% (Sweden, Finland, Switzerland), 50% in Luxembourg and 40-45% in Norway, the UK, and the Netherlands.

In Romania, over the years there have been several strategies regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities at all levels.

In the following, we will list some of the most important ones:

22 - pro-pact.ro

23 - [ANPD](#)

- European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: a renewed commitment to a Barrier-free Europe (24)

Eight main areas of action: accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health, and external action.

- National strategy "A barrier-free society for people with disabilities" 2015-2020 (25)
 - Improving the quality of life of people with disabilities
 - Ensure policy coherence and consolidation
 - Among the principles (affirmed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) underlying this reform are full and effective participation and integration in society; non-discrimination, accessibility, and equal opportunities.

Points of interest:

1. To develop accessible communication and information modalities for people with disabilities.
2. Ensuring equal access to education for children and young people with disabilities and access for people with disabilities to lifelong learning programs and settings.
3. Access to employment for people with disabilities, in particular in the open labor market, on equal terms with members of the community.

- National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2027 (26)

The Strategy 2021-2027 continues and develops the approach of implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in order to ensure the framework for the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.

The overall objective of the Strategy 2021-2027 is to ensure full and effective participation of persons with disabilities, based on freedom of choice, in all areas of life, and in an accessible and resilient environment.

24 - [European Commission, European Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#)

25 - [Anexa nr. 1 Strategia națională "O societate fără bariere pentru persoanele cu dizabilități", 2015-2020](#)

26 - [Strategie Dizabilități 2022-2027](#)



- Alternative Public Policy Employment of People with Disabilities: A RESPONSE TO THE LABOUR SHORTAGE – 2019 (PRO-PACT) (27)

The purpose of this public policy proposal is to identify the best solutions for the socio-professional integration of people with disabilities from vulnerable groups in the Romanian labor market.

Specific objectives:

- 1. To increase by at least 3% annually the number of people with disabilities employed in the Romanian labor market, reaching in 3 years a share of 16.25% of all people with disabilities aged 18-65.
- 2. To create a favorable framework to stimulate and develop sheltered units and social integration enterprises as solutions for sheltered employment or transition to the labor market.
- 3. Development of integrated service packages for people with disabilities from vulnerable groups (psychosocial support, testing and assessment, counseling and career guidance, training, and qualification, mediation, employment and job coaching, etc.) based on the one-stop-shop principle.
- 4. Activating people with disabilities who are difficult to employ in the labor market and reducing pressure on the state budget and reducing the labor shortage in Romania.

Regarding legislation and policies in Romania, the main law is the Constitution of Romania which states that the fundamental rights of people with disabilities are guaranteed by the Romanian Constitution. Article 50 regarding the protection of persons with disabilities, states that "persons with disabilities enjoy special protection. The State ensures the implementation of a national policy of equal opportunities, prevention and treatment of disability, with a view to the effective participation of persons with disabilities in the life of the community, respecting the rights and duties of parents and guardians."

Besides the Romanian Constitution, there are many policies and laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities in different areas:

- 1. Law 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities
- 2. Law No 53/1992 on the special protection of persons with disabilities
- 3. Law No 57/1992 on the employment of disabled persons

4. OR No 102/1999 on special protection and employment of disabled persons
5. Law No 519/2002 amending OU 102/1999
6. Law No 76/2002 on unemployment insurance and employment stimulation
7. Education Act
8. Labor Code
9. Law on social assistance

3.6 Challenges regarding legislation and policies

Challenges in the Context of Youth and disability policies: (28)

- There is limited information regarding the direct impact of (generic) EU policies on people with disabilities, young people with disabilities alone;
- People with disabilities are in some countries absent from discussions on social inequality, exclusion, and poverty;
- The level of poverty among people with disabilities remains high;
- The current policy measures have not been able to offer people with disabilities a safety net that would bring them out of the poverty trap and enable them to lead dignified lives;
- Limited progress has been made in the area of lifelong learning;
- Women with disabilities are particularly under-represented in recreational activities, culture, and sports – in terms of participation, leadership, management, and media coverage. Similarly, children with disabilities face significant barriers to e.g. participation in recreational activities, culture, and sports, and remain poorly served by the provision of education;
- Possibilities for accessing mainstream education tend to be unavailable for children with severe disabilities, and segregation is still widespread all over Europe (e.g. in Germany only 15.7 percent of all children and adolescents with disabilities attend school together with non-disabled pupils);
- Young people with disabilities are far less likely to attend school or to stay in school than their non-disabled peers. Even in countries that are close to achieving universal primary education, people with disabilities represent the largest group still out of school. One issue seems to be that families are less likely to prioritize education for children with disabilities, believing they are not capable of learning.



DEVELOPING EMPOWERMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

4.1. Fostering Inclusion and Enhancing Employability

“Empower to participate and participate to empower” (Casimir Raj M.)

Fostering inclusion and enhancing employability is essential for young people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments/blindness and minor physical disabilities, for several important reasons:

- **Promoting Equality:** Fostering inclusion and enhancing employability ensures that young people with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate fully in society. By removing barriers and providing support, these individuals can access education, employment, and social activities on an equal footing with their peers.
- **Empowering Individuals:** Inclusion and employability empower young people with disabilities to take control of their lives and reach their full potential. It allows them to develop self-confidence, assertiveness, and a sense of autonomy, enabling them to navigate various life domains with independence and dignity.
- **Breaking Stereotypes and Challenging Perceptions:** By fostering inclusion and enhancing employability, society can challenge stereotypes and negative perceptions associated with disabilities. It promotes a shift towards recognizing the unique talents, skills, and contributions that individuals with disabilities bring to the table, thus promoting a more inclusive and diverse society.
- **Economic Independence:** Enhancing employability enables young people with disabilities to become economically self-sufficient. It provides them with the opportunity to secure meaningful employment, earn a fair income, and contribute to their own financial well-being. This independence not only improves their quality of life but also reduces reliance on social welfare systems.
- **Social Integration and Participation:** Inclusion and employability facilitate social integration, enabling young people with disabilities to participate in community activities, build social connections, and engage in meaningful relationships. This sense of belonging and social inclusion enhances their overall well-being and mental health.



- **Economic Growth and Productivity:** Inclusive employment practices contribute to economic growth and productivity. When young people with disabilities are given equal employment opportunities, businesses and organizations benefit from a diverse workforce, fostering creativity, innovation, and improved problem-solving.
- **Human Rights and Social Justice:** Fostering inclusion and enhancing employability aligns with the principles of human rights and social justice. It upholds the rights of individuals with disabilities to equal treatment, equal opportunities, and equal access to resources and services, ensuring a fair and just society for all.

4.2 Developing empowerment

In today's society, empowering young people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments/blindness and minor physical disabilities, is of utmost importance. In a structured way, this part of the Handbook for Empowerment explores the significance of developing empowerment among these individuals, with a focus on cultivating soft skills, enhancing employability, and employing tools and strategies to facilitate their empowerment and social inclusion.

The aim is to serve as a guide and a tool for developing empowerment for youth with disabilities.

- **I. Understanding Empowerment for Young People with Disabilities**

- *Defining Empowerment:* Exploring the concept of empowerment and its relevance in the lives of young individuals with disabilities.
- *Recognizing Unique Challenges:* Examining the specific challenges faced by young people with visual impairments/blindness and minor physical disabilities concerning empowerment and social inclusion.

- **II. Developing Soft Skills for Empowerment**

- *Importance of Soft Skills:* Understanding the significance of soft skills in personal and professional development.
- *Identifying Key Soft Skills:* Highlighting essential soft skills that contribute to empowerment, such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and self-confidence.

Building Soft Skills: Exploring effective strategies, training programs, and educational approaches to develop and enhance soft skills among young people with disabilities.

III. Enhancing Employability for Young People with Disabilities

Equal Employment Opportunities: Discussing the importance of equal access to employment opportunities for young individuals with disabilities.

Addressing Barriers: Identifying and addressing the barriers and misconceptions surrounding the employment of young people with disabilities.

Supportive Programs and Initiatives: Highlighting programs, initiatives, and legislative measures aimed at promoting inclusive employment and vocational training for individuals with disabilities.

IV. Tools and Strategies for Empowerment and Social Inclusion

Assistive Technologies: Examining the role of assistive technologies in empowering young individuals with visual impairments/blindness and minor physical disabilities, enabling them to overcome challenges and participate fully in society.

Mentoring and Peer Support: Exploring the benefits of mentoring programs and peer support networks in fostering empowerment and social inclusion among young people with disabilities.

Advocacy and Awareness: Emphasizing the significance of advocacy efforts and raising awareness to challenge societal perceptions, promote inclusivity, and create a supportive environment for young individuals with disabilities.

Developing empowerment among young people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments/blindness and minor physical disabilities, is crucial for their personal growth, social inclusion, and enhanced employability. By focusing on the cultivation of soft skills, enhancing employability opportunities, and implementing effective tools and strategies, we can empower these individuals to overcome challenges, fulfill their potential, and actively contribute to society. It is our collective responsibility to create an inclusive environment that promotes the empowerment and social inclusion of young people with disabilities, fostering a more equitable and accessible future for all.

BEST PRACTICES

The need to have best practices is crucial for our society's development.

Best practices provide a framework of proven strategies, approaches, and interventions that have yielded positive outcomes in the field. They offer guidance and direction to organizations, policymakers, educators, and practitioners working with young people with disabilities, ensuring that their efforts are aligned with evidence-based approaches. They establish standards of excellence in promoting inclusion, enhancing employability, and empowering young people with disabilities.

By following best practices, organizations can ensure that their programs, services, and policies meet established standards and deliver optimal outcomes.

Best practices are often derived from successful initiatives and programs. They encapsulate valuable lessons learned from past experiences, enabling stakeholders to replicate successful models and learn from the failures and challenges faced by others. This facilitates continuous improvement and the ability to adapt and refine approaches over time.

Best practices empower organizations and practitioners to make informed decisions and take proactive steps in their work. They instill confidence and trust among stakeholders, knowing that their efforts are based on sound evidence and established approaches. This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership, motivation, and commitment to the cause.

Inclusive Vocational Training Programs

Several European countries have implemented inclusive vocational training programs specifically designed for persons with visual impairment and blind youngsters. These programs focus on developing specific job-related skills, providing assistive technologies and accommodations, and offering tailored support to enhance employability.

Mentorship and Peer Support Networks

Establishing mentorship and peer support networks has proven to be an effective practice in empowering and enhancing the employability of persons with visual impairment and blind youngsters. These networks connect individuals with experienced mentors who provide guidance, support, and insights into navigating the job market. Peer support networks foster a sense of belonging and create opportunities for knowledge-sharing and skill development.



Accessible Technology and Assistive Devices

Ensuring access to assistive technology and devices is crucial for empowering persons with visual impairment and blind youngsters. European countries have implemented programs that provide access to accessible technology, such as screen readers, magnifiers, and Braille displays. These tools enable individuals to access information, communicate effectively, and perform job-related tasks independently.

Soft Skills Development through Non-formal Education

Non-formal education programs play a vital role in developing soft skills among persons with visual impairment and blind youngsters. These programs focus on communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and other transferable skills that are crucial for employability. Examples include workshops, training sessions, and experiential learning activities that provide opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Employer Engagement and Awareness Campaigns

Engaging employers and raising awareness about the capabilities and potential of persons with visual impairment and blind youngsters are key practices in enhancing employability. European initiatives have involved collaborating with employers to create inclusive workplaces, providing disability awareness training, and highlighting the business benefits of diverse and inclusive hiring practices.

Italy: “Abilmente – Un ponte tra scuola e lavoro” (29)

“Abilmente” is a job orientation project created by Engim Veneto, a VET regional institution that encompasses different schools all over Veneto region (Italy) providing youth, adults, and workers with courses and job orientation programs. “Abilmente” project is thought to create a bridge to the labor market for people with disabilities in the city of Thiene (district of Vicenza). The project aims to create a place to give students with disabilities the opportunity to socialize with other youngsters and be involved in social, educational, and cultural activities, taking advantage of their skills and capabilities to improve their personal and social autonomy. Project objectives are: Improve personal autonomy, improve students with disabilities skills, support their employability, and ease an inclusive culture in their social context. The project, so far, has created a bar where students with disabilities are employed as cooks and waiters/waitresses and supported by their educators. In the same bar, a place is dedicated to the selling of T-shirts, books, handcraft items, posters, etc. design and/or

created by themselves. The project organizes also workshops on painting, handicrafts, and theatre for students with disabilities. The theatre project provides people with disabilities the possibility to create a semi-professional production that has even toured Italy.

Italy: “In viaggio come a casa” (30)

“In Viaggio come a casa” (2018-2019) project aimed to include blinded people, people with cognitive disabilities, and MS in the tourism industry of the Liguria region. The project oversaw the cooperation among schools, social enterprises, and businesses in the tourism sector to train in the field people with different disabilities. The project aimed to include young people with disabilities in the local labor market; be involved in tasks not traditionally thought for their disabilities and improve their social inclusion. The project was divided into two parts. The first part was a training course of 200 hours for young NEETs with the above-mentioned disabilities, tailored to their needs and held by professionals in the tourism sector and educators. The second part was a part-time internship of six months in tourism businesses for each participant to make them learn by doing and raise awareness among entrepreneurs about workers with disabilities. Particularly, participants used their backgrounds to help tourists with disabilities and families with special needs, creating a more inclusive tourism industry. After one year from the end of the project, 20% of apprentices have been employed by the businesses that hosted them.

Greece: Black Light social cooperative (31)

Black Light is a social cooperative founded in 2017 by blind people with experience in interactive event creation and customer service.

Its main purpose is the design and implementation of B2B educational services that create bridges between people with and without vision. Thus, we bring businesses closer to a class of customers whose habits they often seem to be unaware of. At the same time, through their training and the tailor-made actions they plan, they create jobs for people with disabilities.

Their training courses are available both online and face-to-face.

30 - [In viaggio come a casa: un progetto per l'inserimento lavorativo dei giovani con disabilità](#) | [AISM](#) |

[Associazione Italiana Sclerosi Multipla](#)

31 - [Black Light](#)



The project aims to ensure social inclusion, access, and participation in the digitized labor market of young adults with a disability.

To produce training material and a TOOL KIT which will include all essential resources to acquire entrepreneurial and digital skills so as to be able to enter the digital market and create their own social enterprise.

The development of an educational program that introduces digital and social entrepreneurship competencies for adults with a disability will address the need for overcoming the barriers the group face in the labor market. People with disabilities face important challenges in the labor market such as lower employment rates, earnings, and employer discrimination. According to the European Commission, approximately 16% of the working-age population in the EU is afflicted with a long-standing health problem or disability. The Project derives from the fact that self-employment rates of people with disabilities are increasing due to the necessity to gain independence and autonomy, improve their work-life balance, and adjust between disability status and working life through more flexibility in work pacing.

Direct Target Group: Young adults with disabilities (18 to 30 years old)

Indirect Target Group: Adult Educators/Trainers, Social Workers, Carers, and Experts

Netherlands: Working together to find work

In the Netherlands in 2015, Oogvereniging developed a coaching project called “Working together to find work”, where blind and partially sighted participants learn to use their own strengths to find a job.

In the program, visually impaired people who have a job (coaches) help visually impaired job seekers (coachees) to find a job. Both coach and coachee are matched, based on criteria such as similar training or work experience, type of visual impairment, or personality type. For a year, the coach and coachee consult once every two weeks. The coach assists the coachee in finding out what sort of job he or she wants, how to build a useful network, how to apply for a job, how to communicate about their visual impairment during job interviews, and how to learn to accept their disability.

Over the course of one year, all participants share their experiences in four meetings where they learn to use social media tools when looking for a job; inform employers about the subsidies that are available when hiring them; and find assistive (technology) tools that suit their needs in the working environment. A total of 95 job seekers participated in the program, 80% of whom found a job.

Germany: iBoB (33)

iBoB offers a comprehensive database of options for lifelong learning to professionals who are blind or partially sighted in Germany. For interested participants, with or without impairments, 86 accessible courses are listed on a dedicated website.

Through a completely accessible interface, users can browse the website by the provider, topic (such as IT, Finance, etc.), technique (such as "face-to-face" meetings, e-learning, and long-distance learning), or blended learning, which combines those two ways).

Nine partners have joined the initiative as service providers thus far. The majority of the classes are provided by specialized institutions that have long been active in the low-vision community. These institutions are concentrating on opportunities at the entry-level.

Montenegro: zaposliosi.me (34)

The 'Union of the Blind of Montenegro has developed the website 'employPWD.me' with the goal of connecting and facilitating effective communication between employers and disabled job seekers.

The portal provides a wealth of information geared toward encouraging the employment of people with disabilities. There are employment opportunities for unemployed persons who are looking for work, as well as details on employment rights, financial advantages, and incentives to start working.

Romania: Cofeels Social Cafe (35)

Cofeels Social Café, Cluj-Napoca, where people with disabilities work and a large part of the income goes to people with disabilities.

33 - [iBob Switchboard](#) | [Bobrick](#)

34 - [The portal "ZAPOSLIOSI.ME" \(employpwd.me\) in Montenegro](#) | [European Blind Union](#)

35 - [Cofeels](#)



Cofeels is organized like an SRL, with the difference that 90% of the profit goes to the social purpose. When you buy a coffee/product you take a step towards giving a better life to those who cannot see the world as we do.

Cofeels is a social enterprise through which the entrepreneur Lucian Butnaru wants to bring typical people and people with disabilities together in one place. People who share the same joy: coffee.

The mission of this café is that through the passion for coffee, we can contribute to the quality of life of people with visual disabilities.

Lucian Butnaru, the founder of this project, knows what it means to be visually impaired and to make a good cup of coffee. That led him to put a slightly different message on the 'to go' cups. This message is inspired by those situations when Lucian went with his blind friend to restaurants in Cluj and received negative responses when it came to getting in with the guide dog.

Lucian wants to bring some help in these situations and therefore the message will be about blind people and the guide dog.

Cofeels won the Google Award - Golden Review 2022.

Romania: The Beard Mobile (36)

Beard Brothers, probably the most unconventional NGO in Romania, was founded in November 2013. "The Sisterhood", appeared, followed in 2016 by the Volunteer Crew, where all those who want to help in their activities can get involved.

In our almost 7 years of activity, they have successfully completed 12 large campaigns that aimed to solve problems in the following fields: health, environment, and education (rehabilitation of a hospital ward, equipping hospitals with high-performance medical equipment, purchasing 2 ambulances, biannual tree planting and colonizing projects, mentoring and tutoring students). Therefore, some of their biggest campaigns have been: Beards in Schools – 2014, Rolling Beards – 2015, The Beard Mobile – 2015, Enough is Enough – 2017, Paint the Future – 2018, and Wheels for Life – 2018.

The Beard Mobile is a community taxi project, initiated in 2016 by the Beard Brothers. The Beard Mobile is the first service of its kind in Cluj to provide free transport for people with disabilities and special social cases.



The procedure is as simple as possible, make an appointment (at least 24 hours in advance) and BB will take you, wherever you want!

Beard Brothers have two Beard Mobile cars that are equipped to transport people with disabilities safely.

Romania: Orange Foundation (37)

The Orange Foundation is a non-profit organization that is involved in community life by carrying out philanthropic projects aimed at bringing positive change in the lives of disadvantaged people. In over 8 years of activity, the Orange Foundation has invested 6 million euros in digital education projects for disadvantaged people and in health, education, and culture projects for the benefit of people with visual and/or hearing impairments, with the aim of their social integration.

Orange Foundation organized 2019 the first conference on assistive technologies in Romania. Institutions, businesses, developers, non-governmental organizations, and beneficiaries come together to find innovative solutions that meet the needs of people with disabilities. The conference will discuss the importance of new technologies in integrating people with disabilities as effectively as possible, whether in education, culture, or mobility. In the exhibition area, participants have the opportunity to test assistive technologies such as apps, online platforms, or software developed with the support of the Orange Foundation.

Assistive technologies help people with disabilities cope with everyday life. Whether it's going to school, traveling around town, ordering at the post office, or visiting a museum, assistive technologies play a vital role in integrating people with disabilities. These technologies benefit everyone who interacts in one way or another with people with disabilities: employees, teachers, family members, and representatives of public institutions. For 6 years, the Orange Foundation has supported more than 40 assistive projects with a digital component, totaling an investment of more than €1.8 million through the "World through Color and Sound" grant fund. Today the Orange Foundation extends its support to people with visual and/or hearing disabilities in Romania with a new round of funding.

CONCLUSIONS


In conclusion, the topics and issues discussed in the above chapters shed light on the importance of empowering and enhancing the employability of young people with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments and minor physical disabilities. Throughout the discussion, we have explored the significance of fostering inclusion, developing soft skills, and providing tools and strategies to facilitate empowerment, employability, and social inclusion.

The empowerment of young people with disabilities holds immense value in today's society. By promoting their inclusion, we create a more equitable and diverse world that recognizes the inherent worth and potential of every individual. Inclusion breaks down barriers and challenges societal perceptions, paving the way for a more accepting and inclusive society.

Developing soft skills among young people with disabilities is crucial for their personal and professional growth. These skills encompass communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership, which are essential for successful integration into the workforce and broader society. By investing in soft skills development, we empower young individuals to navigate various life domains, pursue their aspirations, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Enhancing employability for young people with disabilities is not only a matter of economic independence but also a catalyst for social integration and participation. Meaningful employment fosters a sense of belonging, self-worth, and social connections. It enables individuals to lead fulfilling lives, make valuable contributions, and reduce dependency on social welfare systems. Moreover, inclusive employment practices drive economic growth, innovation, and productivity, benefiting society as a whole.





Tools and strategies play a crucial role in facilitating empowerment and social inclusion for young people with disabilities. Accessible technology, assistive devices, and inclusive vocational training programs empower individuals to overcome barriers and perform tasks independently. Mentorship and peer support networks provide guidance, motivation, and opportunities for knowledge exchange. Employer engagement and awareness campaigns create inclusive workplaces that value diversity and tap into the talents and abilities of individuals with disabilities.

European legislation and best practices have been instrumental in advancing the rights and opportunities of young people with disabilities. Legislative frameworks and policy initiatives ensure equal treatment, accessibility, and support services. Best practices, derived from successful interventions, provide guidance and set standards of excellence, promoting effective approaches and continuous improvement.

In summary, empowering and enhancing the employability of young people with disabilities, especially those with visual impairments and minor physical disabilities, is essential for creating a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous society. By fostering inclusion, developing soft skills, providing tools and strategies, and leveraging European legislation and best practices, we can break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and unlock the full potential of young individuals with disabilities. It is our collective responsibility to create a world where every young person, regardless of their abilities, can thrive, contribute, and lead fulfilling lives.



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