

FACILITY JOB

Methods and Practices Toward Post Diploma Work Placement
of Disadvantaged Learners – Best Practices from Poland and Italy



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1. About the "Facility Job" Project

1.1 Project Partners

The implementation of the project was made possible through the cooperation of the Coordinator and Partner Organizations at every stage, from the initial version to the implementation phase. Additionally, the creation of this manual was contributed to by employees of organizations that support the activation of graduates from vocational education and training (VET – definition below) and assist them in entering the labour market.

VET stands for **Vocational Education and Training**, which refers to a broad range of educational and training activities aimed at preparing individuals for specific professions and equipping them with the practical skills necessary in the labour market.

Key Aspects of VET:

1. Vocational Education – Involves learning in vocational schools, technical schools, and vocational courses, where students acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge related to specific professions.
2. Vocational Training – Refers to further education and enhancement of skills already acquired on the job, including courses, workshops, and training offered by employers, training institutions, or government agencies.
3. Internships and Apprenticeships – Programs that provide opportunities to gain work experience in real-world conditions, helping apply the knowledge gained in practice.
4. Certification and Qualifications – VET often leads to obtaining certificates, diplomas, and other formally recognized qualifications that are necessary to perform specific jobs or roles in the labour market.
5. Diverse Educational Pathways – VET can encompass various levels of education, from basic to advanced training, tailored to the different needs and skill levels of students.
6. Support for People with Disabilities – VET programs also include initiatives that support individuals with disabilities, adapting training and education to meet their individual needs.
7. Integration with the Job Market – VET aims not only to provide skills but also to facilitate the transition into the labour market through collaboration with employers and by tailoring training programs to the current needs of the market.

VET is a key component of educational systems and labour markets worldwide. In the European Union, VET is part of the European Qualifications Framework and is supported by various programs such as Erasmus+, which promote mobility and cooperation in vocational education and training.

Project Partners



Aurive Social Cooperative – Italy

<http://www.aurive.it/>

Aurive is highly experienced in managing job placement centres within a network of 17 VET schools in the Piedmont region of Italy and in cross-sectoral collaboration with employment offices and public authorities. In this context, Aurive contributed to the project by providing expertise in strengthening soft skills through non-formal education and volunteering, and supported the transfer of best practices gathered through the We4job network, which includes over 15 job placement centres linked to vocational and technical schools in northern Italy. The organization collaborates with regional and national VET and adult education authorities. Aurive also has extensive experience in career counselling.



Inspire Consulting – Poland

<https://inspire-consulting.pl/eng>

Inspire Consulting Sp. z o.o. has been operating since 2006 in the areas of consulting, training, technological, social, and educational innovations, carrying out its own projects and supporting numerous external entities (through partnerships or services). The company's resources include both qualified, experienced staff and an entire network of contacts and relationships built over the years with numerous industry experts, companies, universities, schools, and entities from the first and third sectors.

The applicant's activities focus on vocational education services, including those provided within the Development Services Database system or co-financed from other sources (regional and national programs), as well as on developing tools to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and user-friendliness of the educational process (both digital solutions and methodologies, as well as internship programs). The company is a not-for-profit entity, and according to applicable law and its statute, it allocates its income to non-commercial purposes, investing in activities aimed at fostering innovation, including improving educational processes or conducting research and development work.

Inspire Consulting initiated and coordinated a unique system of cross-environmental and cross-sectoral cooperation, developing social potential, which from 2011 to 2024 enabled the implementation of numerous projects related to knowledge transfer between education, science, and business, as well as the creation of new innovative solutions in the field of education and vocational training, strengthening the potential of businesses and human capital across the country. The company has completed 27 projects co-financed by national and regional funds.

Since 2016, Inspire Consulting has been implementing international cooperation projects in the field of vocational education and adult vocational training.

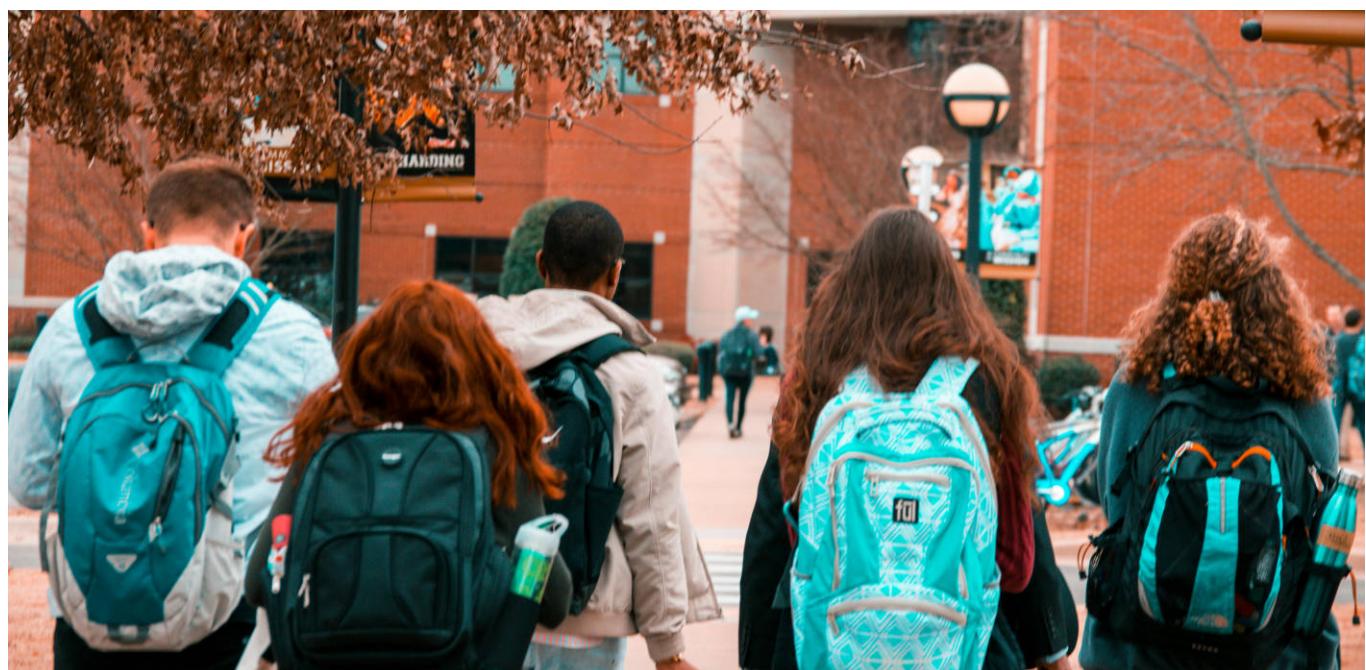
1.2 Project Objectives

The "Facility Job" project (orig.: "Facility Job — Methods and Practices Toward Post Diploma Work Placement of Disadvantaged Learners") aimed to improve models and methods of job placement and vocational activation as tools to support disadvantaged youth, giving them opportunities to enter the job market after leaving secondary school.

Job placement programs and support for students and graduates of vocational schools play a crucial role in enabling young people at risk of unemployment and social exclusion to access the labour market. These programs utilize internships and apprenticeships, both domestically and abroad, to this end. Therefore, we aim to initiate a discussion on the importance of internships as a tool for disadvantaged young graduates to access the labour market, improve their skills, and enhance the sustainability of their employment.

Students with special educational needs are at risk of exclusion, and their chances of succeeding in the labour market are very limited. The project's goal is to initiate changes in this area and to help disadvantaged individuals, including graduates with disabilities, in gaining employment.

The focus is particularly on maximizing the benefits of job placement services in VET schools to support integration into the labour market and re-engagement in the process of upskilling or reskilling. This aims to counter the European and global crises that disproportionately affect young people in disadvantaged professional situations due to special needs.



The specific goals of this publication are:

- Discussion and comparison of good practices in job activation and placement to raise awareness among vocational education and training graduates about the benefits of internships or vocational placements.
- Improvement of the skills of coordinators and trainers involved in vocational internships in VET schools.
- Exchange of practices and effective models of cooperation between entities offering vocational internships, public employment services, social services, and private companies to strengthen cross-sector collaboration in job placement services.
- Sharing ideas and solutions to enhance the effectiveness of job placement services within the VET sector.
- Responding to the needs of disadvantaged individuals who have recently graduated from high school or are currently studying by providing adequate support:
 - Support in acquiring soft and professional skills;
 - Building a positive attitude toward work;
 - Support in accessing internships in the graduate's field, by providing the development of technical and soft skills, with attention to aspects such as workplace communication, shaping working conditions, building team awareness, and self-development.

Methodology in the Project:

The methodology and approach used to achieve the main objective involved secondary source research. The research aimed to determine the current labour market situation in each partner country concerning the vocational activation of individuals with disabilities and those in disadvantaged situations. Special attention was given to identifying the opinions of key stakeholders in job placement, vocational education and training, and social inclusion policies, with a focus on the quality of job placement services for graduates with special needs and vocational education and training programs.

We explored the following key issues related to job placement:

- The education system,
- Challenges faced by graduates with disabilities in the labour market and their causes,
- Proposed solutions to the main issues related to vocational internships for disadvantaged students,
- Key needs regarding tools, mechanisms, and procedures for working with disadvantaged students or graduates,
- Problems employers face in the labour market related to the professional integration of employees with disabilities, and employers' needs for support to better prepare for internships and placements for students, trainees, and graduates with disabilities,
- Best practices in vocational activation related to job placement for students, trainees, or graduates with disabilities.

Additional research sources in the project include documented national strategies, research articles, and statistical databases (OECD, Eurostat, the World Bank, and national statistical entities).



What are best practices?

A best practice can be defined as a "model worth following," meaning a way of proceeding that is better than any other at a given moment. A best practice is characterized by the ability to act effectively and achieve good results in various contexts. It is a successful experience that has been tested and is therefore worth sharing and disseminating so that it can be widely applied.

Characteristics of best practices:

- Clear definition of the goal, tasks, and impact we want to achieve;
- Clear definition of the actions to be taken (direct or indirect beneficiaries, stakeholders, participants, media engagement);
- Effectiveness, efficiency, and successful outcomes;
- Social sustainability of the actions;
- Technical feasibility;
- Potential for replication and adaptation to conditions different from the original ones.

It is important to consider that every context has its own elements and characteristics — for this reason, each best practice requires different methods of implementation. A successful outcome is the result of collaboration, so the involvement of various individuals, specialists, and organizationally diverse entities in the implementation of best practices is a key factor for success.

The best practices we have selected refer to models and methods for utilizing soft skills and organizational actions that provide individuals with disabilities greater opportunities to enter and remain in the labour market.

Criteria for recognizing job placement programs as best practices:

1. Inclusiveness: The job placement program included individuals in disadvantaged situations.
2. Development of Comprehensive Competencies: The program enabled the target group to develop a range of skills and competencies that are currently relevant in the labour market.
3. Practical Applicability of Skills: The skills developed within the job placement program can also be used outside of work, in other aspects of life.
4. Social Benefits: The job placement program had a positive impact on the lives of participants with disabilities in terms of:
 - o Social integration and reintegration
 - o Civic engagement
 - o Opportunities for social mobility

The above list of criteria can be used as a guide for organizations and institutions working on this topic, as well as a reference point for policymakers and program developers supporting the employment of Persons with disabilities.

2. Vocational Education and Training of Persons with Disabilities, Their Situation in the Labour Market, and Activation

2.1 Vocational Education and Training in Poland

Since the 1990s, interest in vocational education in Poland has been declining. The labour market began to lack workers with practical vocational skills, drawing employers' attention to the inefficiency of the vocational education system. These issues were confirmed by numerous press articles highlighting the high demand for workers with specific vocational qualifications, while at the same time noting the growing number of unemployed graduates. This pointed to a widening gap between the skills being supplied to the labour market and those actually needed by the economy. The underfunded vocational education sector was not only losing students but also affecting the decline in the knowledge and skills of teachers, who were losing touch with the real labour market, new technologies, and working methods.

The period of political transformation in the 1990s was particularly challenging for vocational education. The collapse of many enterprises, economic changes, and education reforms caused a crisis in the system. Vocational schools struggled to adapt to the new labour market demands, making them less attractive to students. Additionally, the prestige of these schools declined in favor of less expensive general education schools, and a negative stereotype of vocational school students as poorly qualified became entrenched, deepening the crisis in this area of education.

Poland's accession to the European Union and the associated economic development gradually increased interest in vocational education. This led to a debate about its quality and the necessary changes. It was not until the adoption of the law amending the education system in 2011 that the process of modernizing vocational education began, enabling the Minister of National Education and other entities and individuals responsible for education to take action in this area.

The Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 15 February 2019, on the general goals and tasks of education in vocational schools and the classification of vocational professions came into effect on 1 September 2019. It included a list of 215 vocational professions. The regulations began to be applied from the 2019/ 2020 school year, starting with first-year classes in first-degree vocational schools and in the first semester of post-secondary schools, and from the 2020/ 2021 school year, also in the first semester of second-degree vocational schools. In subsequent years, they covered other types of schools.

The Ministry of Education and Science continuously updates the vocational education offer to respond to the changing needs of the labour market. An example of this is the introduction of a new program in the field of electromobility technician, which will be available from September 2024.

The education system in Poland includes various educational paths, from primary school to higher education and qualification courses. A brief description is provided below.

1. **Primary School:** Compulsory education lasting 8 years, after which students can choose different paths for further education.
2. **General Secondary School (Liceum):** Lasts 4 years. Prepares students for the final exam (matura) and higher education.
3. **Technical Secondary School (Technikum):** Lasts 5 years. Enables students to obtain both general and vocational secondary education. After completing technical secondary school, students can take the matura exam and continue their education at universities or start a professional career.
4. **First-Degree Vocational School:** Lasts 3 years. Prepares students for a specific profession. Graduates can continue their education in a second-degree vocational school.
5. **Second-Degree Vocational School:** Lasts 2 years. Enables students to obtain secondary vocational education and take the matura exam.
6. **Post-Secondary School:** Offers various vocational courses for high school graduates (both general and technical), lasting from 1 to 2.5 years.
7. **Higher Education Institutions:** Universities offering bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies.
8. **Qualification Vocational Courses:** Provide vocational qualifications, available for individuals with different levels of education.
9. **Special Vocational Preparation School:** For students with special educational needs, preparing them for independence and professional work.

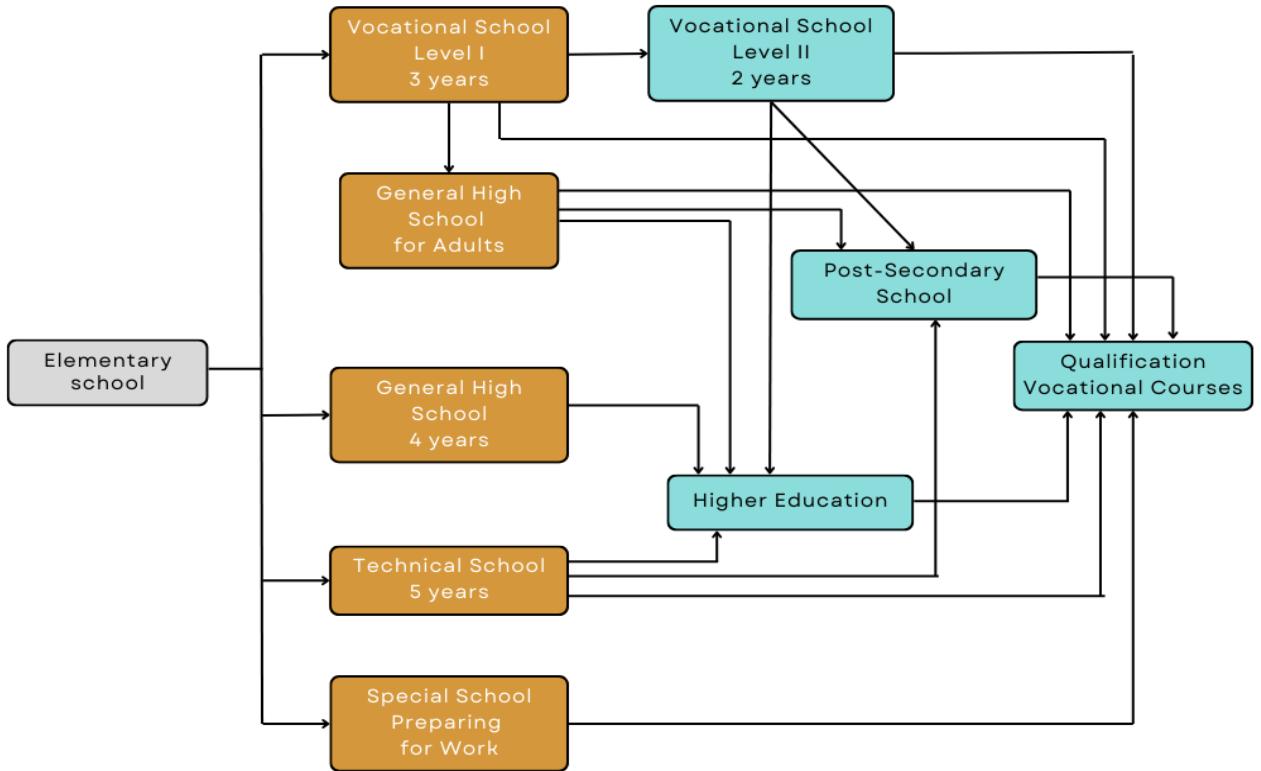


Chart 1. Own elaboration

In the Polish education system, internships and vocational placements are mandatory in various types of schools:

1. **Technical Secondary School (Technikum):** Students in technical secondary schools are required to complete vocational internships, which are an integral part of the curriculum. The number of internship hours depends on the field of study and may vary depending on the specific profession. According to the general regulations of the Ministry of National Education, technical secondary school students are required to complete at least 280 hours of vocational internships during the entire education cycle, which spans five years. However, depending on the field, the number of internship hours may be higher, as specified in the core curriculum for the given profession.
2. **First-Degree Vocational School:** According to regulations, students in first-degree vocational schools must complete at least 390 hours of vocational internships per year, totaling approximately 1,170 hours throughout the three-year education cycle. These internships can be carried out in businesses or school workshops. An important aspect of internships in first-degree vocational schools is that students can be employed as juvenile workers, meaning they are employed under a work contract for vocational preparation. This allows them to gain not only practical skills but also professional experience, increasing their chances in the job market after graduation.

3. **Second-Degree Vocational School:** Continuing education in second-degree vocational schools also includes vocational internships, which allow students to deepen the skills they previously acquired.

Vocational internships and placements in these schools aim to better prepare students for the labour market by allowing them to acquire practical skills and professional experience during their studies.

The Education Law of 14 December 2016, requires school principals to cooperate with employers operating in industries related to the taught professions. This cooperation takes place in seven areas:

1. Creating patronage classes, which involves the employer's engagement not only in equipping classrooms but also in the school's activities and participation in various educational projects.
2. Developing vocational curricula by teachers, who must take into account labour market demands and modern technologies.
3. Providing students with opportunities for internships in companies, allowing them to gain practical professional experience.
4. Collaborating on equipping school laboratories with appropriate teaching tools that meet the requirements of the current labour market.
5. Organizing vocational exams.
6. Improving teacher training by organizing sector-specific training, so that teachers stay up to date with technological innovations and labour market needs.
7. Implementing career counselling and promoting vocational education to support students in choosing their career paths and to raise the prestige of this form of education.

Collaboration between schools and employers can benefit both



students, who gain practical experience, and schools, which enhance the attractiveness of their educational offerings and better adapt to the needs of the labour market.

An increasingly important element of vocational education is patronage classes, and more large companies are choosing to invest in the education of their future employees by supporting these classes. They focus on student development through:

- Funding scholarships and language courses;
- Guaranteeing employment for the most talented graduates;
- Employer participation in the modernization of school facilities;
- Subsidizing and equipping patronage classes by companies;
- Organizing practical training with the involvement of the sponsoring company, including vocational internships for students and graduates of vocational schools.

To ensure the high quality and effectiveness of vocational internships with employers (including vocational placements), the following steps need to be taken:

1. Organizing activities in real work environments.
2. Developing vocational internship standards by authorized institutions (Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna CKE – Central Examination Board, relevant ministries, employers, educational authorities, and craft and trade chambers).
3. Preparing practical training programs and organizing vocational internships.
4. Creating the necessary documentation to ensure the proper functioning of the internship.
5. Monitoring the progress of vocational internships (student progress).
6. Assessing the knowledge and skills of students.

The Education System for People with Disabilities:

It is important to mention that in Poland, a dual system of disability certification exists within the education system.

The first component of this system is a disability certificate issued based on medical documentation by the District or Municipal Disability Assessment Team. The second component is a certificate of the need for special education, issued by public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres.

Only the combination of these two certificates allows for the creation of individualized forms of support for Persons with disabilities within the national education system.

There are three main types of schools:

- **Mainstream Schools** — These are public schools intended for children living in the local area.
- **Schools with Integrated or Inclusive Classes** — For both students with and without disabilities. Typically, in a class of 15-20 students, 3-5 children have special educational needs.
- **Special Schools** — Educational institutions in Poland designed for children and youth with various types of disabilities who require an adapted educational approach and care. The goal of these schools is not only education but also supporting the comprehensive development of students and preparing them for independent living and social integration.

Types of disabilities for which special schools are established:

- **Intellectual disabilities** (mild, moderate, severe, and profound).
- **Physical disabilities**, including aphasia and other motor impairments.
- **Sensory disabilities** (e.g., blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing).
- **Autism and autism spectrum disorders**.
- **Multiple disabilities**, i.e., the presence of more than one disability.

Special education for students with disabilities can be organized in all types of primary and secondary schools, as well as in all types of kindergartens and schools:

- mainstream schools,
- mainstream schools with integration classes,
- mainstream schools with special classes,
- integration schools,
- special schools.

Special Schools characteristics:

- **Teaching Staff**

Special schools employ teachers with appropriate qualifications, specialized education, and experience working with children with various types of disabilities.

Teachers are often also therapists, specialists in special education, speech therapy, physiotherapy, or psychology.

- **Individualized Learning**

In special schools (as well as in mainstream schools), an Individualized Educational-Therapeutic Program is created for each student with a certificate of special education needs, tailored to their needs, abilities, and developmental pace.

The program defines the scope and manner of adapting educational requirements to the individual developmental and educational needs, as well as the psychophysical abilities of the student, by using appropriate methods and forms of work.

- **Adapted Infrastructure**

Special school buildings are designed or adapted to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This includes facilities such as elevators, ramps, specialized bathrooms, sensory aids, and appropriately equipped classrooms.

Schools are equipped with specialized educational, therapeutic, and rehabilitation equipment to support the teaching and therapy process.

- **Therapies and Additional Activities**

Students in special schools participate in various forms of therapy, such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, physiotherapy, sensory integration therapy, and activities that develop their social and emotional skills.

Art therapy, music therapy, and movement therapy sessions are also organized to support students' development.

- Small Student Groups

Classes in special schools are conducted in small groups, allowing for an individualized approach to each student and more effective support in learning and development.

- Support for Parents and Guardians

Special schools also offer support for parents and guardians by organizing informational meetings, workshops, and consultations with specialists to help better understand the child's needs and provide support in daily life.

- Social Integration

Although special schools focus on tailored education, one of their goals is to prepare students for social integration. Various activities are organized to involve students in social life, such as field trips, artistic projects, and joint events with students from mainstream schools.



A vocational preparation school is a three-year post-primary institution for students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, as well as for students with multiple disabilities. The main goal of such schools is to effectively prepare students for adult life. Here, young people not only learn various practical skills but also develop abilities such as working with peers, mutual help, and solving problems together.

Students participate in classes focused on personal and social functioning, communication development, creativity, work preparation, physical education, and compensatory classes. The range of courses offered varies depending on the school's resources and the students' abilities. Courses may include ceramics, carpentry, applied arts, office work, hospitality, cooking, and gardening.

After completing vocational school, students have the option to continue their education or look for a job. They can remain in school until the age of 24. Not all graduates manage to find employment and achieve independence. Special schools collaborate with companies, organizing courses for graduates on writing resumes, job search techniques, and arranging internships.

Although graduates are prepared for work and life in society, many of them may still require support. Inclusive education is the third type of education in Poland, alongside segregated and mainstream education. As the name suggests, inclusive education emphasizes that all children, regardless of the diversity of needs or development pace, learn together. In inclusive education, the focus is on ensuring that Persons with disabilities feel like fully valued members of the school and classroom community.

Depending on the specific profession and decisions made by educational authorities (including school principals), vocational schools may accept students with mild intellectual or physical disabilities. Special classes or schools preparing students for professional life are also created.

One common concern among students considering vocational schools in special centres is whether the professions they are being trained for will be accessible to them. However, it is important to note that before starting education in a given profession, each candidate undergoes a medical examination to determine whether the individual can safely perform the chosen profession. After completing school, students receive a certificate of completion of first-degree vocational school, and after passing the exam, they receive confirmation of vocational qualifications.

Additionally, with the needs of young Persons with disabilities in mind, auxiliary professions have been introduced into the Polish vocational education system (under the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 May 2021, Core Curricula for New Professions). An example is the profession of a gastronomic assistant. This solution increases students' chances of completing school and acquiring a profession while considering the economy's needs in terms of building vocational qualifications.

For auxiliary professions, various institutions collaborate, such as the Ministry of Education and Science, which sets the core curricula and exam standards, and special schools, which implement the teaching programs.

Qualification exams for such professions are external and conducted similarly to those in other schools. The Central Examination Commission is responsible for developing exam standards and overseeing their administration.

2.2 Vocational Education and Training in Italy

With the decline in employment rates, which virtually halted in the second half of 2012, Italy bore the brunt of an economic and financial crisis: young people were particularly affected, with their unemployment rate doubling since 2008, and reaching a staggering 40% in 2013.

Data on education attainment and unemployment, as well as the OECD skills surveys, indicate that Italy is currently facing a dual challenge: a labour market that is unable to fully absorb the available human resources (especially in the south), and skills mismatch resulting from education choices that do not align with job opportunities.

A collaboration among schools, businesses, social partners, and third sector organisations is necessary to identify potential areas of growth, define types and levels of qualifications, determine fundamental skills and offer relevant education. Vocational Education and Training (VET) aims to provide individuals with a combination of theoretical and practical skills, enabling them to perform specific occupations while also offering opportunities for career advancement and skill enhancement.

In 2000, regional vocational education and training was integrated into the national training and education system, taking its current form. It consists of three main segments, all of which are accessible through apprenticeships as well as the school-based pathway:

- Three- and four-year (3+1) programmes;
- Post-secondary higher technical specialisation programmes;
- Post-secondary higher technical programmes.

Italian VET is characterised by a multilevel governance involving national, regional and local stakeholders. The ministries of education and labour establish general rules and common principles for the system. VET schools oversee upper secondary VET school pathways (EQF 4-ISCED 354). Regions and autonomous provinces oversee VET programmes and most apprenticeship programmes. Social partners contribute to defining and implementing active employment policies relevant to VET and lifelong learning (LLP).

Compulsory education lasts 10 years, up to the age of 16. At age 14, learners make a choice between general education, secondary VET school pathways, and regional VET pathways (EQF 3 or 4-ISCED 353).

1. At the upper secondary level, the following VET programmes are offered:

- 5-year programmes (EQF level 4) at technical schools (istituti tecnici), leading to technical-education diplomas; at vocational schools (istituti professionali), with programmes leading to professional-education diplomas. Programmes combine general education and VET and can also be delivered in the form of alternance training. Graduates have access to higher education.
- 3-year programmes (istruzione e formazione professionale, IeFP) leading to a vocational qualification (attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale, EQF level 3);
- 4-year programmes leading to a technician professional diploma (diploma professionale di tecnico, EQF level 4).

All upper secondary education programmes are school-based, but could be also delivered as apprenticeships.

Students attending vocational (VET) courses typically follow a five-year program. Starting from the third year until the end of the fourth year, they are required to complete a mandatory professional internship. In 2015, under Law 107/2015 (known as "La Buona Scuola"), this internship was introduced under the name of alternating work and school and included 400 hours. However, since 2018, the program has been transformed into PCTO (Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento – pathways for transversal skills and career guidance).

Under Law No. 145/2018 of December 30, 2018, the following changes were introduced:

- The minimum hourly requirement for alternating work and school in vocational schools (VET) was reduced from 400 hours to 210 hours.
- The PCTO program can be implemented from the third to the fifth school year.
- Teachers who supervise students during PCTO help them create a personal digital portfolio, offering tools for self-assessment and career guidance. The skills acquired during PCTO will be evaluated during the state exam.

For students with disabilities, the PCTO program is also mandatory, in accordance with Legislative Decree No. 77/2005. Schools are required to organize activities in such a way that promotes their independence, assists in finding employment, and ensures the removal of any architectural barriers at internship or workplace locations. The goal is to provide students with appropriate support to help them develop their skills and find employment.

It is possible to combine VET qualifications with other high school-level courses to obtain a diploma that allows for entry into higher education. For example, after obtaining a 3-year vocational qualification, it is possible to attend an additional year leading to a 4-year vocational diploma: this allows students to enroll in the fifth year of the national education system and take the state exam for a general, technical, or vocational education diploma.

2. At the post-secondary level, vocational education and training functions as higher technical education for graduates of 5-year upper secondary schools or 4-year IeFP programs who have passed the entrance exams:

- Higher Technical Education and Training courses (istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore, IFTS): one-year post-secondary non-academic programs leading to a certificate of advanced technical specialization (certificato di specializzazione tecnica superiore, EQF level 4);
- Higher Technical Institutes programs (istituti tecnici superiori, ITS): two- or three-year post-secondary non-academic programs leading to a high-level technical diploma (diploma di tecnico superiore, EQF level 5).

These courses are organized by foundations representing schools, universities, training centres, businesses, and local authorities.



The following diagram shows how VET schools are situated within the Italian education system:

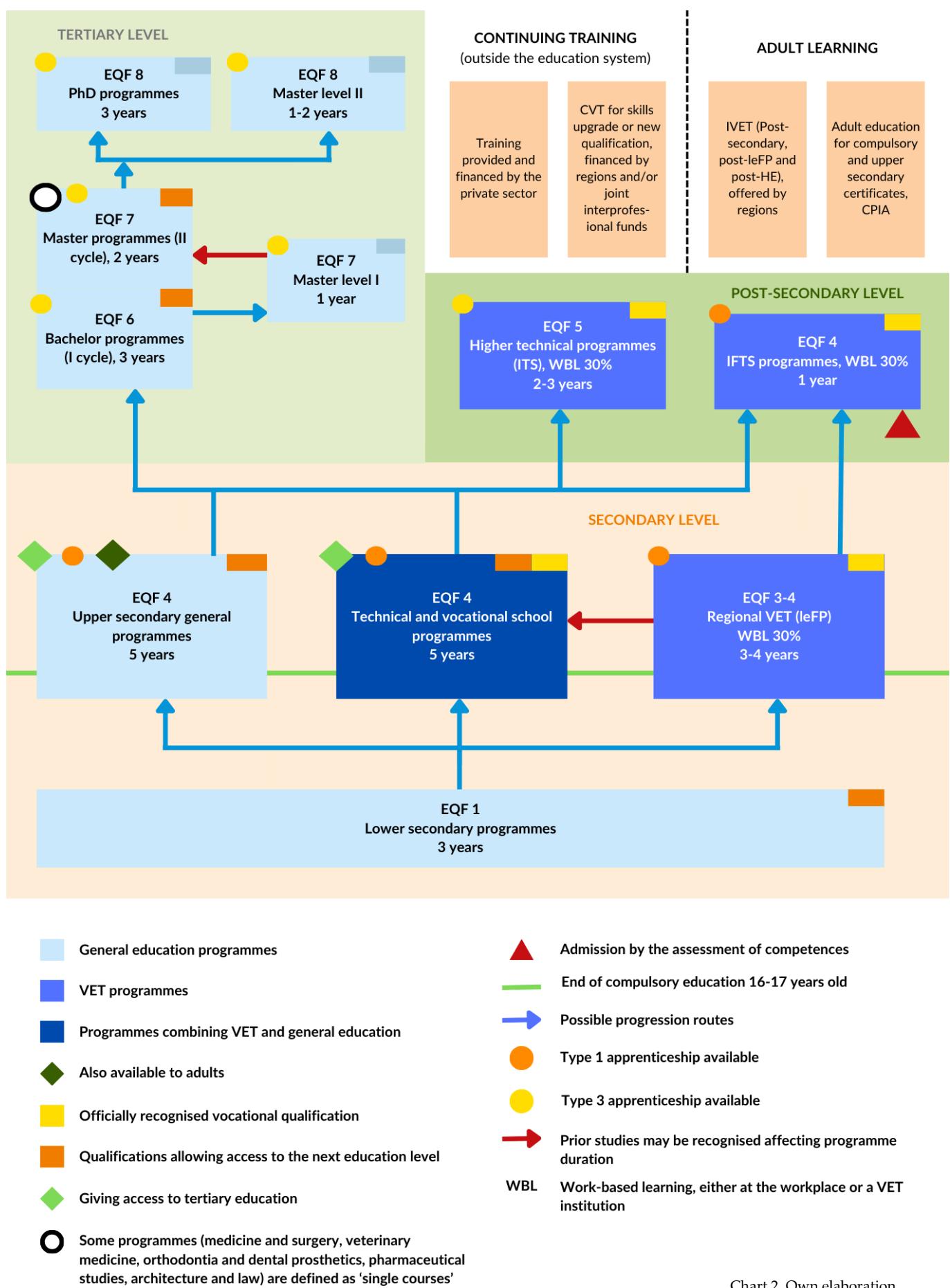


Chart 2. Own elaboration

In recent years, several reforms have been carried out to make VET more flexible and responsive to labour market needs:

1. In 2020, in order to raise the level of digital skills, the Government implemented the first national strategy for digital skills, covering both the education and labour market sectors.
2. The promotion of the dual system in IeFP aims to relaunch apprenticeships with the allocation of new resources from the Government (MLPS) for the realisation of paths characterised by a high amount of in-company training (minimum of 400 hours per year) or virtual business simulation, and new individualised training plans.
3. To increase the formative value of work-based learning pathways, the school-work alternance (ASL, Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro) has been replaced by transversal competence and guidance pathways (PCTO, Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e per l'Orientamento) since 2019.
4. In order to improve the collaboration between training providers and small/medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), regions and interprofessional funds have supported the training of teaching staff in developing new skills within the framework of the enterprise 4.0 national plan and the new (digital) transition 4.0 plan.

In technical school programs (istituti tecnici), students can acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies to perform technical and administrative tasks. In vocational school programs (istituti professionali), students receive specific theoretical and practical training to perform skilled tasks in production fields of national importance.

There are various types of post-secondary vocational education and training (VET). These programs were restructured in 2008 (DPCM 25.1.2008) with the main goal of developing post-secondary professional specializations to meet the needs of both the public sector and the open labour market.

There are two main options:

- Higher Technical Education and Training programs (istruzione e formazione tecnica superiore, IFTS);
- Programs at Higher Technical Institutes (istituti tecnici superiori, ITS).

These programs are planned and organized by regions and autonomous provinces within territorial plans, which are updated every three years.

IFTS Programs

Higher technical education and training programs are available nationwide in 20 areas of specialization. They adhere to educational standards established at the national level (Decree of 7.2.2013) and can be further tailored at the regional level to meet the needs of the local labour market.

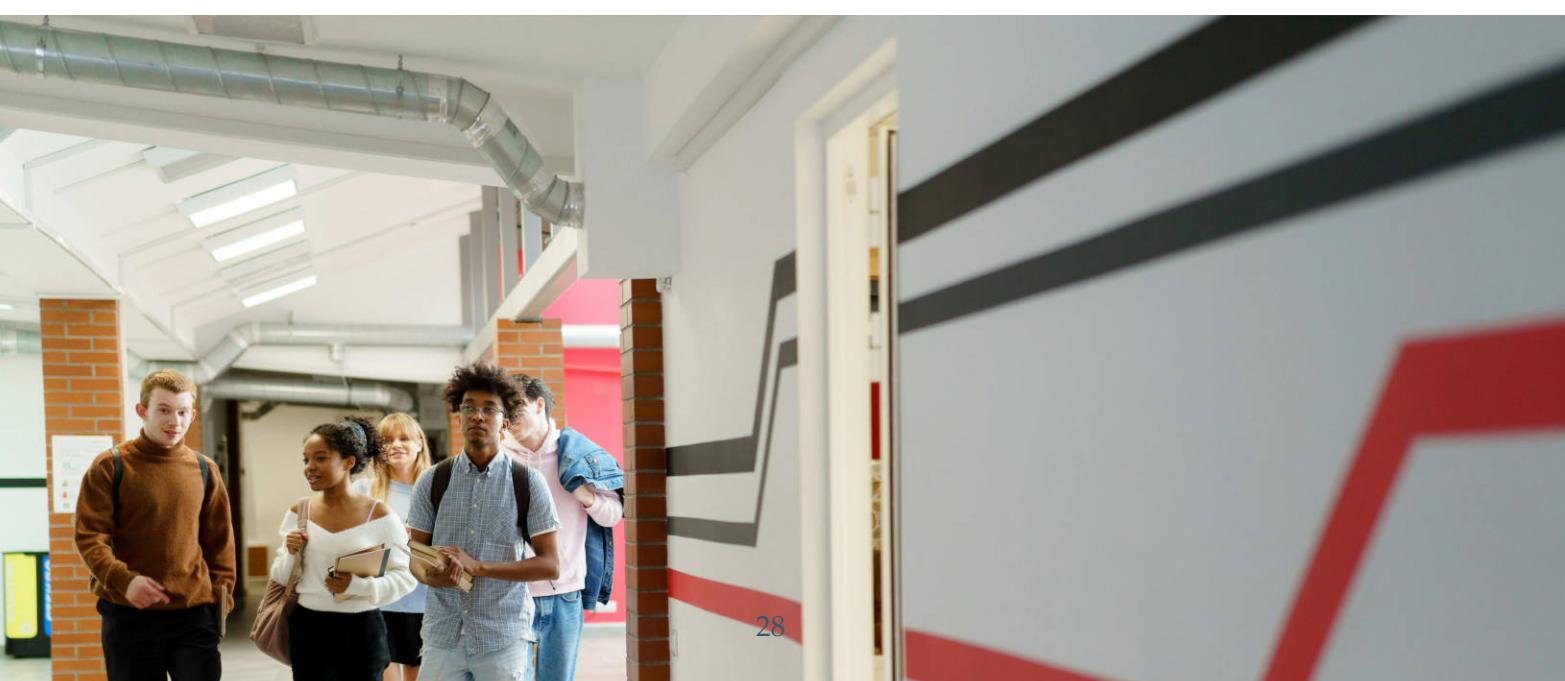
These programs also include essential skills in relational and managerial areas. A mandatory internship constitutes 30% of the total workload. IFTS programs are developed by regional authorities and must involve at least four VET providers from the education system, the vocational training sector, universities, and the business sector. These entities work in synergy through formal partnerships with temporary associations and consortia or within the framework of IFTS POLI.

ITS Programs

Programs at Higher Technical Institutes (ITS) offer non-academic higher education training, covering 29 national professional profiles. These programs focus on training specialized technicians in six key technological areas critical to the country's development.

ITS programs are aimed at both young people and adults who have at least completed secondary school. They provide opportunities to complete vocational apprenticeships designed to encourage young people to pursue vocational education. At least 50% of the training must be conducted by professionals from relevant industries and sectors. ITS operate as foundations (Fondazione di Partecipazione).

Currently, there are 63 ITS across the country, offering a total of 139 programs.



Vocational Apprenticeships

In Italy, apprenticeships refer to employment contracts with a specific training purpose. On-the-job training is combined with classroom instruction.

Since apprentices are classified as employees, they are entitled to insurance covering work-related injuries, accidents, occupational diseases, health issues, aging, disability, maternity, household benefits, and, as of January 1, 2013, social security contributions for employment. Vocational apprenticeship programs were reformed in 2011 to facilitate the integration of young people into the labour market.

Employers in Italy who offer apprenticeships benefit from several incentives, including reduced social security contributions depending on the size of their business:

- Micro-enterprises (employing up to nine workers) are fully exempt from social security contributions for the first three years of an apprenticeship contract. In the fourth year, they pay only 10% of the taxable social security contributions.
- Companies employing more than nine workers pay a flat-rate social security contribution of 10% of the taxable base throughout the entire duration of the apprenticeship.

Three Types of Vocational Apprenticeships:

1. Apprenticeships for obtaining a vocational certificate of operator and a vocational diploma of technician (apprendistato per la qualifica e il diploma professionale)

In the Italian education system, young people aged 15 to 25 have the right and obligation to continue their education or participate in training programs. No specific entry qualifications are required to join these programs. However, students typically continue their education for at least one year in upper secondary school (e.g., high school or technical school) or in vocational education and training (IeFP) programs after completing lower secondary school (middle school) before starting an apprenticeship. If they are already 15 years old, they may begin these apprenticeships directly.

The duration of an apprenticeship contract in Italy depends on the time required to obtain the relevant certificate or diploma, which usually takes three to four years. A minimum requirement is to complete at least 400 hours of training per year.

These programs offer the opportunity to obtain qualifications at two levels:

- Professional Operator (attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale) – qualification at EQF level 3 (European Qualifications Framework),

- Professional Technician (diploma professionale di tecnico) – qualification at EQF level 4.

These qualifications are recognized at the national level. After obtaining the operator certificate, apprentices can continue their education in the fourth year to earn the professional technician diploma.

Access to university studies is possible after completing secondary school and an additional one-year course at an educational institute that prepares students for higher education.

2. Professional Apprenticeships (apprendistato professionalizzante or contratto di mestiere)

This program is aimed at individuals aged 18 to 29 who seek to obtain qualifications specified in collective labour agreements and required in the job market. The training consists of two parts:

- a. Acquisition of key skills (120 hours of training over a three-year period, regulated by regions and autonomous provinces, delivered by training centres);
- b. Acquisition of professional skills (training provided directly by companies, where professional areas and training content are defined in collective labour agreements).

These programs typically last up to three years, except in the artisan sector, where the duration may extend to five years. Successful completion of the program results in the award of regional qualifications.

3. "Higher Education and Research" Apprenticeships (apprendistato di alta formazione e ricerca):

This program covers qualification levels from 4 to 8 of the EQF and is designed for individuals aged 18 to 29. Participants have the opportunity to obtain qualifications typical of school, higher education, or university programs, including doctoral degrees. Apprentices can also engage in research activities in private companies or complete internships to enter professions such as law, architecture, or business consulting. Regions and autonomous provinces, in collaboration with social partners and public education and training centres, define the duration of contracts and program organization, ensuring alignment with fully school-based curricula.

They also determine the academic credits (crediti formativi universitari) that learners earn at schools, universities, or training centres, as well as the skills that can be acquired through workplace training in businesses.

Entities involved in the planning and organization of vocational education and training (VET):

- Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research (MIUR) establishes the framework for VET within national school programs (technical and vocational schools) for ITS and IFTS.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLPS) defines the framework for regional IeFP, while autonomous provinces are responsible for planning, organizing, and providing services;
- Regions and autonomous provinces are responsible for planning, organizing, and implementing ITS, IFTS, post-IeFP, higher education, and most apprenticeship programs.
- Ministry of Labour sets the goals for Continuous Vocational Training (CVT) within the public system. CVT activities are managed by regions, autonomous provinces, or social partners. Social partners play a key role in promoting training plans at the company level (individual or group of companies) funded by regions or joint intersectoral funds.
- Social partners provide general advisory input on VET policy, influencing recommendations regarding the VET offer.

Currently, the Italian education system for individuals with disabilities is based on an inclusive education model, considered one of the most advanced in Europe. The system ensures the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schools and offers a wide range of support.



Key elements of this system:

1. Inclusive Education

In Italy, students with disabilities attend the same schools as their peers without disabilities. Educational integration was introduced in the 1970s when special schools were abolished (with a few exceptions). The goal is to include children with various types of disabilities in social and educational life, rather than isolating them.

2. Support Teacher (Insegnante di Sostegno)

Every school with students with disabilities employs support teachers. Their role is to assist not only the students with disabilities but also the rest of the class, helping to create an inclusive educational environment. The number of support teachers depends on the number of students with disabilities in the school and the degree of their needs.

3. Individual Educational Plan (PEI)

An Individual Educational Plan (Piano Educativo Individualizzato, PEI) is developed for each student with a disability. This plan is created by a team consisting of teachers, specialists, parents, and, whenever possible, the student. The PEI tailors the curriculum to the specific needs of the student, taking into account their abilities and limitations.

4. Intersectoral Cooperation

In Italy, cooperation between schools, healthcare, and social care is a key element of educational support for students with disabilities. Health services, such as rehabilitation specialists or psychologists, work with schools to assess the child's needs and develop support strategies.

5. Disability Certification (Certificazione di Disabilità)

In order for students to receive appropriate support, they must have a disability certification issued by relevant medical institutions. This certification is the basis for assigning a support teacher and other forms of assistance in school.

6. Technological Support

The Italian education system also strives to utilize modern technology to assist students with disabilities. This includes specialized tools and software designed for students with visual, hearing, or motor impairments.

7. Smaller Classes

According to Italian regulations, if students with disabilities are present in a class, the number of students in that class may be smaller than the standard size, allowing teachers to dedicate more attention to individual support.

8. Support at Every Stage of Education

The support system for students with disabilities in Italy covers all stages of education, from preschool to high school. This support is not limited to teaching but also includes assistance in the student's social and emotional development.

The Italian system of education for students with disabilities is based on the idea of inclusive education and integration within mainstream schools. Despite its challenges, this model is considered one of the most progressive in Europe.



2.3 The Situation of Persons with Disabilities in the Labour Market in Poland

In Poland, the employment rate of Persons with disabilities is lower than the European Union average. According to data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) from 2023, approximately 477.4 thousand Persons with a disability certificate were economically active. The employment rate for Persons with disabilities in Poland is around 29%, while the EU average is 47%. The low employment level is linked to many barriers, including limited access to education and restricted opportunities for professional development.

In terms of wages, Persons with disabilities often receive salaries close to the minimum wage and have limited prospects for career advancement. This results from employment in positions that do not require special qualifications or involve simple, repetitive tasks – regardless of qualifications. In Poland, Persons with disabilities often work in jobs such as security, cleaning, or basic office work, which only intensifies the marginalization of this group in the labour market.

Research shows that education plays a key role in increasing the employment opportunities for Persons with disabilities. Higher education significantly improves their chances in the labour market; however, simply leveling the educational playing field is not enough for full integration (see: *Niepełnosprawni w Polskiej Gospodarce: Raport GUS na Czerwiec 2023 – FUNDACJA DLA NIEWIDOMYCH MISJA I ROZWÓJ – MIR; Jak zwiększyć zatrudnienie osób niepełnosprawnych w Polsce? - IBS - Instytut Badań Strukturalnych*).

During the implementation of the project, other barriers that hinder stable and satisfying placement of Persons with disabilities in the labour market were also identified. Project interview respondents pointed to the following issues:

Barriers to employing Persons with disabilities:

1. Employers often struggle with hiring their first employees with disabilities. This initial step confronts company representatives with their own perceptions of disability and the capabilities of this demographic in the workplace. Additionally, there is uncertainty about which tasks can or cannot be performed by Persons with disabilities, posing a problem during the hiring process. Disability certificates may limit employment options without specifying the individual's actual abilities, leaving employers uncertain.

2. The regulations governing the employment of Persons with disabilities, as outlined in the law of 27 August 1997, are not always well understood. Despite indicating the degree of disability—severe, moderate, or mild—employers frequently express frustration with bureaucratic obstacles, including excessive regulations, paperwork, and the need to adapt workplaces. There is a misconception that accommodating the needs of Persons with disabilities requires costly and specialized solutions.
3. Stereotypical beliefs about disabilities lead to inadequate assessments of individual capabilities to perform certain types of work. The limited availability of positions suitable for Persons with disabilities perpetuates the misconception that most roles are unsuitable for them.
4. There is a mistaken belief about the quality of work performed by Persons with disabilities. Concerns about productivity, work quality, absenteeism, flexibility, and social competencies arise from viewing employees with disabilities as a homogeneous group. This misconception is often reinforced by the belief that supervisors need to provide greater oversight of the work performed by Persons with disabilities.

Job offers for Persons with disabilities are not always tailored to their needs and capabilities. This issue extends beyond financial constraints and involves a lack of awareness. Initiatives are needed to show both employers and other team members

that persons with disabilities can be fully competent and motivated employees. In this context, low-cost measures such as preparing the rest of the team to work with individuals with disabilities can be important, fostering an empathetic and inclusive work environment.

The rules governing the employment of persons with disabilities and contributions to the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON) in Poland are regulated by law.



Here are the key points:

1. Obligation to employ persons with disabilities:

Employers with at least 25 employees (calculated as full-time equivalents) are required to employ persons with disabilities.

The minimum employment rate for persons with disabilities is 6% of the total number of employees in a given company or institution.

2. PFRON contributions:

Employers who do not meet the required 6% employment rate for persons with disabilities are required to make contributions to PFRON.

The amount of the contribution is calculated based on the number of missing disabled employees needed to reach the required rate. The formula for calculating the contribution is: $40.65\% \times \text{the average monthly wage for each missing person with a disability}$.

3. Exemptions from the obligation to contribute to PFRON:

Employers with at least 25 employees who achieve an employment rate of 6% or higher for persons with disabilities are exempt from making contributions to PFRON.

Exemptions may also apply to employers who hire people with severe or profound disabilities, where a lower rate may be required.

4. Benefits for employers:

Employers who hire persons with disabilities may apply for various grants and reimbursements related to wages and workplace accommodations.

PFRON offers financial support for adapting workplaces, training, and other activities aimed at integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market.

5. Penalties:

Failure to make the required contributions to PFRON by employers who do not meet the required employment rate for persons with disabilities may result in financial penalties and the obligation to pay overdue contributions along with interest.

The purpose of these regulations is to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and support their integration into the labour market.

Actions Supporting the Employment of People with Disabilities:

The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON) plays a key role in supporting the employment of persons with disabilities through wage subsidies and other forms of assistance. The amount of the subsidy depends on the individual needs and situation of the person with a disability and can range from 450 PLN to 1,800 PLN per month, with the possibility of additional support for individuals with special needs.

Despite these supporting measures, the employment rate of persons with disabilities remains significantly lower than that of other social groups, which presents a major challenge for both social policy and the country's economy.



2.4 The Situation of Persons with Disabilities in the Labour Market in Italy

Italy is internationally recognized as one of the few countries in the world that has implemented the right to inclusive education for all students with disabilities in mainstream schools since the 1970s. Experts and scholars such as Michael F. Giangreco, Mary Beth Doyle, and Jamie C. Suter have visited schools and examined Italy's school integration policies to describe these educational policies and their innovations.

Beyond school-related issues, the social and economic integration of persons with disabilities is also an important political matter. Professional integration is a fundamental right, and ensuring it is the responsibility of public administration. The European Union recognizes the importance of such integration, which is essential for achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy, and more recently, the European Green Deal and Recovery Plan. However, the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market remains a complex task. In reality, disability still poses challenges in the job market.

The Italian Law 68/99 aims to address this issue. This law was enacted in 1999 and, despite some updates, remains in effect. It requires companies to employ a specified percentage of persons with disabilities among their workforce and provides tax incentives to companies that hire employees with a certain degree of disability. In cases of non-compliance, companies are subject to fines. However, the level of compliance with the law remains relatively low. Therefore, it would be highly beneficial to investigate the reasons for non-compliance and the tools available to policymakers to reduce it.

The goal of Law 68/99 is to ensure the right to work for persons with disabilities. It obligates public institutions and private companies that reach the employment threshold of 15 employees to hire individuals with disabilities according to a specific framework:

- 1 employee with disabilities in a company employing from 15 to 35 employees,
- 2 employees with disabilities in a company employing from 36 to 50 employees,
- 7% of employees with disabilities in a company employing more than 50 employees.

According to analyses by ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics), the employment rate has increased thanks to the implementation of Law 68/99 and the integration of students with disabilities into the labour market. This improvement is also attributed to the use of best practices in workplaces and the involvement of public institutions in hiring graduates. As shown in the table below, the 18-24 age group recorded the largest increase between 2018 and 2022, with the employment rate rising by 14.5% (from 44.6% to 59.1%).

	% OCCUPYING POSITIONS AS OF 31.12.2018	% OCCUPYING POSITIONS AS OF 31.12.2022	DIFFERENCE
GENDER			
WOMEN	43,3	46,6	3,3
MEN	40,0	44,1	4,1
LEVEL OF EDUCATION			
ISCED 0	15,4	19,2	3,8
ISCED 1	43,0	46,0	3
ISCED 2	33,2	34,7	1,5
ISCED 3	42,0	50,0	8
ISCED 4	47,4	51,7	4,3
ISCED 5	56,5	57,1	0,6
AGE GROUP			
17-24	44,6	59,1	14,5
25-34	52,0	57,1	5,1
35-44	47,5	50,6	3,1
45-54	39,5	42,7	3,2
OVER 55	24,8	20,6	-4,2

Categories with the most significant positive changes in the percentage of employed persons between 2018 and 2022 are highlighted in green, while negative changes are highlighted in red.

Table. Own elaboration

2.5 The Vocational Activation System in Poland

In Poland, institutions that activate persons with disabilities play a key role in their integration into the labour market. The following are facilities and institutions providing career counselling services.

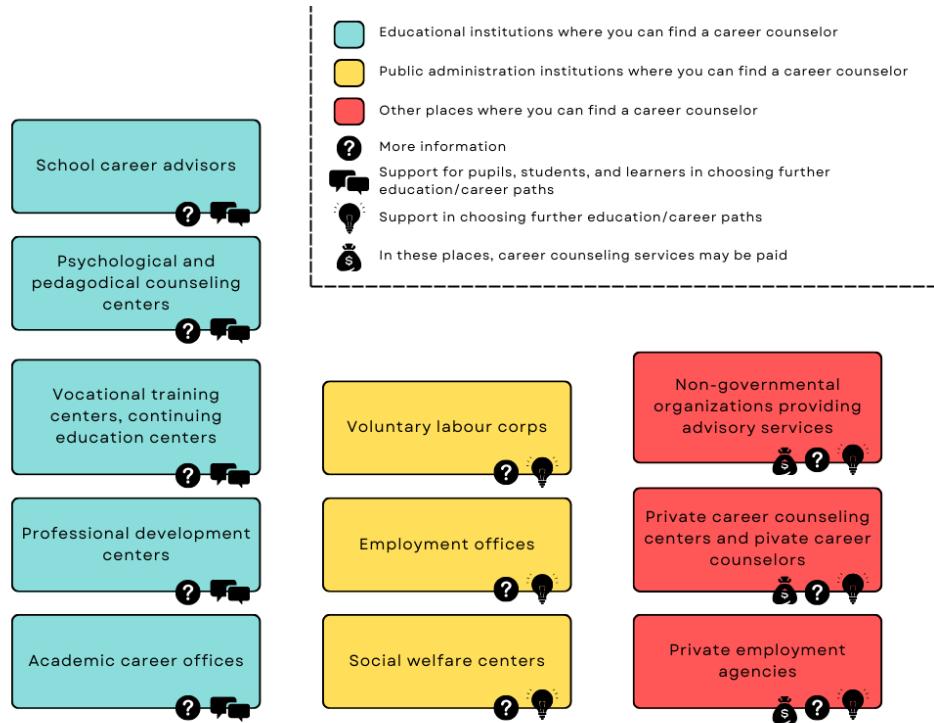


Chart 3. Own elaboration

School Career Counsellor (*Szkolny doradca zawodowy*)

Career counselling in schools aims to prepare young persons to make informed decisions about their career paths and further education. It encompasses a range of activities that help students navigate the labour market and consciously plan their careers according to their potential. The counsellor's support involves individual meetings during which the student can better understand themselves, their interests, and expectations, as well as explore the opportunities offered by the education system and labour market.

The career counsellor gathers information about the student's interests, abilities, personality traits, and health condition. Using this data, the counsellor can analyze and identify potential career paths for the student.

The activities of the school career counsellor include not only individual counselling but also supporting the entire school community on career planning matters. The counsellor helps students, parents, and teachers by educating them on how to support the career decision-making process and by presenting effective steps to achieve professional goals. Additionally, the counsellor motivates students to enter the labour market and organizes educational meetings to help them plan their future careers.

Career counsellors also collaborate with various support institutions such as school boards, career information and planning centres, employment offices, and lifelong learning facilities. This cooperation involves organizing meetings with representatives of different professions, inspiring students with stories of successful professionals, and participating in educational fairs. Counsellors also coordinate the school's informational and advisory activities and work with the Pedagogical Council to create and maintain the internal school career counselling system.

Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centre (*Poradnia psychologiczno-pedagogiczna, PPP*)

Psychological and pedagogical counselling centres offer a wide range of support, including diagnosis, developmental assistance, and fostering the talents of school-aged children. These centres conduct tests for issues such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Additionally, they perform tests for hyperkinetic disorders (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorders. Parents can bring their children to the centre if they suspect intellectual disabilities. During examinations at the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre, the child's language abilities, memory, and intellect are assessed. These centres also organize specialized sessions that cover psychological, pedagogical, and speech therapy aspects.

Vocational Training Centre and Lifelong Learning Centres (*Centrum Szkolenia Zawodowego i Centrum Kształcenia Ustawicznego*)

The Vocational Training Centres is a public, interschool educational institution established to organize and conduct educational activities. It focuses on developing practical skills through exercises, laboratory work, measurement tasks, research exercises, and project-based methods.

The Lifelong Learning Centres is a public institution, usually part of a school complex in the Polish education system. Its primary role is to provide lifelong learning opportunities for adults, facilitating the acquisition of vocational qualifications.

Vocational Training/ Improvement Institution (*Zakład szkolenia/ doskonalenia zawodowego*)

A vocational education institution run by non-governmental organizations or other legal entities engaged in educational activities in the field of vocational training. These institutions organize vocational courses, training programs, and run vocational schools, often associated with the Association of Vocational Training Institutions.

The offerings of these institutions may be paid, free, or partially subsidized—depending on decisions made by governing bodies and market conditions. Many training programs are commissioned through Vocational Training Centres by various institutions and companies. Some vocational courses organized by ZDZ are funded by district labour offices, European funds, or the Labour Fund. Employers can also commission training for their current and future employees.

Academic Career Offices in Poland (*Akademickie Biura Karier*)

In accordance with the Act of 20 April 2004, on the promotion of employment and labour market institutions, academic career offices are units established to support the vocational activation of students and graduates of higher education institutions. These offices are run by universities or student organizations.

Voluntary Labour Corps (*Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy, OHP*)

A state budgetary unit supervised by the minister responsible for labour. The Voluntary Labour Corps carry out tasks aimed at promoting employment, combating marginalization, and preventing social exclusion among young persons aged 15-25. They also focus on education and upbringing of youth in difficult financial situations. Their responsibilities include initiatives aimed at preventing and alleviating unemployment among young people, such as providing free services like job search assistance, career counselling, informational sessions, effective job search workshops, and organizing training programs.

Employment Offices (*Urzędy pracy*)

Institutions that assist the unemployed in finding work. Additionally, they organize training programs to improve qualifications and activate the unemployed through initiatives such as professional internships.

Social Welfare Centres (*Ośrodki pomocy społecznej*)

Social welfare aims to help individuals and families in difficult life situations that they are unable to overcome on their own. These centres support meeting basic needs, provide financial assistance, and offer organizational activities to prevent exclusion—particularly for persons with disabilities. Additionally, social welfare strives to promote actions that foster independence and integration within the community.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Created to address social problems and meet needs that the state cannot handle alone or chooses to delegate to non-budgetary or local government units. The specific nature of NGOs allows them to carry out many tasks more quickly and cost-effectively than even the most efficient government agencies.

Private Career Counselling Centres (agencies, foundations, associations):

Within these institutions, career counsellors provide commercial services. Their activities focus on aspects such as:

- Identifying the client's psychophysical traits, analysing their life situation, and reviewing their previous work experiences;
- Assessing the client's needs, abilities, and existing skills to determine their professional potential;
- Analysing the labour market and educational opportunities to align the client's needs and skills;
- Presenting the requirements and characteristics of various professions;
- Lifelong education, particularly in terms of counselling tools and methodologies;
- Guiding the client through a long-term support process, addressing key life events such as changing schools or starting a job. The counsellor helps the client discover a suitable career path and engage in educational activities that support their development.

Private Employment Agencies

These are companies that provide assistance in finding employment. Unlike public employment offices, these agencies operate under different regulations. Employment agencies are approached by companies seeking candidates for specific positions. Their responsibility is to find suitable candidates in a short period of time.



A subset of employment agencies are temporary employment agencies, which specialize in temporary job placements. They match individuals with companies that need temporary workers, for example, to cover sick leave or maternity leave.

2.6 The Vocational Activation System in Italy

Public employment offices provide career counselling and targeted, inclusive job placement services. They operate in every Italian province and are coordinated by regional agencies (such as Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro in Piedmont, a public branch operating at the regional level).

Targeted, inclusive job placement services for persons with disabilities that support effective matching between disabled jobseekers and hiring companies. The matching process is based on a skills assessment, followed by advisory services aimed at developing personalized projects for skills enhancement and job placement for persons with disabilities.

People with disabilities are supported by public employment offices through the following activities:

- Internships (Tirocinio) – Internship programs that enable persons with disabilities to gain professional experience in real work environments, increasing their chances of employment.
- Workplace Monitoring Activities – Monitoring services that provide support and supervision in the workplace to ensure the work environment is adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities and that they can effectively perform their duties.
- Modernization of Employment Contracts – Facilitation of adapting employment contracts to the needs of persons with disabilities, for example, by modifying working hours, job responsibilities, or employment conditions.
- Vocational Training – Programs and courses aimed at developing the professional skills of persons with disabilities to better align with the demands of the labour market.
- One-Time Funds for Starting a Business – Grants or other forms of financial support to help persons with disabilities start their own businesses.
- Vouchers (Buoni) – Vouchers can refer to various forms of financial support or allowances that can be used for employment or training needs, such as discounts on services, purchasing training materials, or other forms of financial assistance.

The goal of these targeted vocational integration services offered by public employment offices is to provide a set of integrated activities that help job-seekers with disabilities recognize their own potential, rather than focusing on possible "barriers" related to their disability.

Public employment offices utilize the Employment Fund and implement projects co-financed by the European Social Fund PLUS (ESF+), as well as Regional Programs.

The integration services that assist persons with disabilities in finding employment collaborate with various health and social institutions to achieve the goal of employing these individuals. Public employment offices work alongside doctors who assess the degree of a person's disability. Based on this assessment, it is determined whether the individual is eligible for specific forms of support and assistance.

Doctors perform this assessment by reviewing the patient's medical history, which has been compiled by physicians working within the local public health service (ASL – Azienda Sanitaria Locale). The medical report contains detailed information on the types of work the individual can perform, considering their health condition. For example, it specifies whether the patient is able to work in an office, operate machinery, or work effectively with others.

To obtain the necessary disability report, the patient undergoes a standard process overseen by a committee composed of 5 to 6 members: a general practitioner (who conducts the initial assessment), two or three forensic doctors, the committee chair, and a member of social services. The second report is crucial in determining whether the person with a disability is fit or unfit for work and whether they require any special support to safely work, in line with the medical diagnosis. Once the committee is formed, the public employment office can begin providing targeted job placement services.



Public employment offices cannot actively participate in the committee's voting and decision-making, but they can start assessing suitable job opportunities and establish contacts with employers and companies. However, the employment offices can express their opinions to the committee, offering a professional perspective on the individual's capabilities, overall condition, ability to work, and the best-matched employment opportunities.

One of the methods employed in these services is a competency assessment conducted by a professional career counsellor from the employment centre.

The process is divided into the following stages:

- Supporting the job-seeking person with disabilities in self-analysis of their personal and professional profile (in terms of personality, career aspirations/goals, and motivation for vocational integration goals);
- Assessment of overall training results and soft/hard skills acquired by the job-seeking person with disabilities (through both professional and non-professional experiences);
- Skills evaluation through assessment tests and job interviews;
- Definition and description of the skills assessment, containing detailed information on the following elements:
 - Strengths and weaknesses of the job-seeker
 - Personal attitudes and interests
 - Motivation
 - Areas for improvement in lifelong learning and continuous training to strengthen skills

The results can be summarized as follows:

- Greater effectiveness in matching job offers with the profiles of employees with disabilities.
- Better alignment with the expectations of job-seeking individuals with disabilities.
- Increased durability of the match between job-seeking individuals with disabilities and companies offering targeted job positions.
- Improved quality of the skills assessment system for individuals with disabilities.

The qualitative elements of the methods used by public employment offices can be summarized as follows:

- Use of "skills assessment" methods to support employees with disabilities in realizing their potential and strengths. Understanding the personal/professional profile of the jobseeker facilitates the process of matching supply and demand for employment;
- Strengthened intersectoral collaboration between public employment services, social services, private non-governmental organizations, and businesses. This cooperation is a key factor in enhancing the employment prospects of persons with disabilities, particularly through the development of social innovation projects co-managed by the aforementioned entities.

The National Institute of Social Security INPS (Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale) – manages support programs for persons with disabilities, including benefits for those unable to work and various forms of financial support.

Employment Centres (Centri per l'Impiego) – offer assistance in vocational activation, counselling and organization of training and internships. They operate at regional and local levels.

The National Association for People Injured and Disabled Due to Work Accidents, ANMIL (Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Invalidi del Lavoro) – supports individuals with disabilities related to workplace accidents. The organization provides assistance with vocational activation, counselling, and legal support.

The ASPHI Foundation (Associazione per lo Sviluppo del Progetto Informatico per Handicappati) – A foundation focused on the development of technology to support persons with disabilities. It offers training, counselling, and assistance with technologies that aid in professional integration.

Employment Agencies (Agenzie per il Lavoro) – Private employment agencies, which often specialize in hiring persons with disabilities and offer various services, such as career counselling, internships, training, and assistance in finding employment.

Local Institutions and Municipalities – Implement programs for the professional activation of persons with disabilities, including local initiatives, support projects, and funding activities related to labour market integration.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) – Often provide support for persons with disabilities, including career counselling, training, and other forms of assistance for vocational activation.



3. Research methodology

3.1 Research Objective and Methods

The creation of the Polish-Italian partnership in the project was driven by a shared goal: to analyse methods of professional activation for persons with disabilities and individuals facing challenges in entering the labour market. We decided to focus on vocational training and internships, as well as on expanding the knowledge, skills, and abilities of young persons in the labour market.

The internship program plays a key role in the education and professional integration of young people, including those with disabilities. There are several reasons why this is particularly important in the context of persons with disabilities:

- **Practical Experience:** Internships allow students to gain real-world professional experience, which is invaluable when searching for a job later on. For persons with disabilities, the opportunity to test themselves in real work environments is crucial, as it better prepares them for future professional challenges.
- **Professional Skills:** Students acquire specific skills that are in demand in the labour market. People with disabilities can gain specialized qualifications that increase their competitiveness in the job market.
- **Social Integration:** Internships support social integration through interaction with various professional groups. For individuals with disabilities, this is particularly important, as it helps break down barriers and stereotypes related to disability.
- **Employer Awareness:** Internship programs raise employer awareness of the needs of persons in challenging situations, which can lead to improved working conditions and greater openness to hiring individuals with disabilities.

The internship program in the context of persons with disabilities provides benefits such as:

Workplace Adaptation

Employers participating in internship programs are required to provide safe and accessible workplaces for individuals with disabilities. This may include physical adjustments to workstations, as well as providing appropriate tools and assistive technologies.

Individual Approach

Internships can be tailored to the individual needs and abilities of persons with disabilities, allowing them to fully utilize their potential. The scope of the internship is determined in collaboration with teachers and parents (in the case of minors), ensuring appropriate support and progress monitoring.

Support from Schools and Institutions

Schools and educational institutions play an active role in organizing internships, providing additional support for individuals with disabilities. This may include assistance from career counsellors, vocational rehabilitation specialists, and other experts.

Increased Employment Opportunities

Internships enhance the chances of individuals with disabilities to gain employment by building their experience and skills. Employers who have the opportunity to work with interns are more likely to hire them permanently.

Promoting Equal Opportunities

Enabling persons with disabilities to participate in internship programs is a step towards equal opportunities in the labour market. Internships help reduce discrimination and promote social inclusion.

By analysing student internship programs, several benefits of promoting good practices in the activation of individuals in difficult situations can be observed. These include:

- Improvement in the Quality of Education and Training: Analysing internship programs helps identify strengths and areas in need of improvement in vocational education and training.

This allows programs to be adjusted to meet current labour market needs and the individual needs of students, including those with disabilities.

- Graduate Employment Rate: Vocational internships equip students with practical skills and experience valued by employers. Analysing these programs can lead to the development of more effective teaching methods, thereby increasing graduates' chances of finding employment after completing their education.
- Social Integration: Internship programs, especially those aimed at individuals with disabilities, promote social and professional integration. Analysing these programs can help create more inclusive workplaces and a society where everyone has equal opportunities for growth and self-fulfilment.
- Development of Local Labour Markets: Internships strengthen cooperation between schools and local businesses. This can lead to better alignment of workers' skills with the needs of local labour markets, which in turn supports the economic development of the region.
- Identification of Barriers and Challenges: Analysing internship programs allows for the identification of barriers and challenges faced by both students and employers. This enables the development of strategies aimed at overcoming these obstacles, leading to more effective implementation of vocational programs.

Social Outcomes of Promoting Equal Opportunities:

- Increased Employment – Improving vocational practices can lead to higher employment rates among young people and individuals with disabilities. Higher employment levels contribute to reducing unemployment and increasing the economic stability of society.
- Increased Innovation and Competitiveness – Internships promote the transfer of knowledge and innovation between education and industry. Young workers who are well-prepared for employment bring new ideas and perspectives, which can enhance the competitiveness of companies and the entire economy.
- Reduction of Social Inequality – Internships targeted at persons with disabilities help reduce social inequalities by providing them with better employment opportunities and social integration. This contributes to building a more just society.

- Better Alignment of Education with Labour Market Needs – Analysing internship programs allows for better alignment of the education system with the actual needs of the labour market. This, in turn, leads to more efficient use of human resources and reduces skill mismatches.
- Promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility – Employers involved in internships often promote values associated with corporate social responsibility. This can lead to the creation of more ethical and socially engaged companies, which positively impacts society as a whole.

The Facility Job project aims to improve models and methods of utilizing workplaces through vocational education and training (VET) as a tool to support integration opportunities in the labour market for young people in difficult situations after completing their education.

Institutions focused on professional activation and employment mediation play an increasingly important role in bridging the labour market gap for youth at risk of unemployment and social exclusion. Therefore, we aim to compare the effectiveness of internships, vocational training, and raising awareness of an inclusive labour market in Poland and Italy as tools that enable especially vulnerable graduates to take advantage of opportunities for sustainable career building. This requires sharing best practices, disseminating them, and promoting them in EU countries.

The goal of the project is to improve the innovation and quality of services that support the transition of students from vocational schools to the labour market. The project aims to facilitate a smooth entry into the world of work for young people, including students with special educational needs, through vocational training, internships, and other forms of support in gaining experience. This will increase their chances of success in the job market, especially for those at risk of exclusion. The project addresses the needs and expectations of students in difficult situations who have recently completed or are about to complete vocational education, offering them additional support in preparing for employment and integration into the labour market.

The project specifically addressed the following needs of individuals in disadvantaged situations:

- Support for self-awareness of personal and professional skills;
- Building a positive attitude toward work;
- Assistance in accessing internships or vocational placements tailored to the student or graduate, with the opportunity to simultaneously develop both technical and soft skills, taking into account aspects such as conscious workplace shaping and personal development.

The project will also address the needs of VET organizations and related institutions in developing and managing innovative training programs aimed at better preparing individuals for the changing workplace:

- Teaching about changes in the labour market and the complexity of the workplace;
- Expanding knowledge, skills, and abilities in the labour market;
- Improving decision-making skills;
- Increasing self-esteem and motivation;
- Building interpersonal effectiveness;
- Maximizing career development opportunities;
- Promoting effective job placement services;
- Strengthening relationships with employers.

For the research process, questionnaires, interviews, and the selection of best practices were used.



The study aimed to examine the current labour market situation in each of the partner countries regarding the entry of persons with disabilities into the workforce. Particular attention was paid to identifying the opinions of key stakeholders on employment, vocational education, social inclusion policies, and the quality of job placement services for persons with disabilities who have completed vocational education and training. Specifically, the following key issues related to job placement were explored:

- Problems faced by graduates with disabilities in the labour market and their causes.
- Proposed solutions for supporting the employment of persons with disabilities.
- Main needs in terms of tools, mechanisms, and procedures for effectively placing persons with disabilities, including graduates, in the labour market.
- Barriers to employing persons with disabilities from both the employers' and the employees' perspectives (e.g., lack of self-confidence, lack of knowledge about the current labour market, social alienation, communication deficits, stereotypes).

3.2 Selected Vocational Activation Units in Poland

Conducting interviews with employees of the institutions listed below is valuable for several reasons. Each of these institutions has unique experiences and approaches to the activation of persons with disabilities and those in difficult life situations, which can provide valuable insights into best practices in this field.

The Activation Foundation (*Fundacja Aktywizacja*) — a non-governmental organization whose goal is to support persons with disabilities in their pursuit of full participation in social and professional life. The Foundation implements a range of programs and initiatives aimed at vocational, educational, and social activation of individuals with various types of disabilities. An interview with the staff of the Activation Foundation provided valuable insights into vocational activation programs, training and courses, cooperation with employers, and individual support. Conducting the interview enriched the study with unique practices and experiences in the area of professional activation for persons with disabilities, offering important information on effective support methods that can be applied in various contexts and institutions.

The Municipal Labour Office in Olsztyn (*Miejski Urząd Pracy w Olsztynie MUP*) — engages in extensive activities aimed at combating unemployment, organizing training programs, implementing individual action plans, and activating the unemployed, including persons with disabilities.

An interview with the employees of this institution highlighted effective support methods for job searching, organizing professional internships, and market integration. Additionally, the institution shared experiences in managing resources from the Labour Fund and the European Social Fund, which are crucial for financing activation programs.

The Educational Institutions Complex in Olsztyn (*Zespół Placówek Edukacyjnych w Olsztynie ZPE*) — specializes in the education and rehabilitation of children with various disabilities. Conversations with staff provided insights into the best educational practices, methods for integrating students with disabilities, and programs preparing them for employment. Their experience in working with children and youth on the autism spectrum and with complex disabilities can be both inspiring and valuable for creating effective support, rehabilitation, and employment integration programs.

The Warmian-Masurian Assembly of Persons with Disabilities (*Warmińsko-Mazurski Sejmik Osób Niewidzialnych, WMSON*) — represents the interests of persons with disabilities and supports their social and professional integration. The interview with the Assembly's representatives provided information on efforts aimed at removing barriers, promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, and creating conditions for their active participation in social and professional life. The Assembly's experience in collaborating with authorities, NGOs, and businesses is key to understanding how to effectively implement policies of equal opportunity and integration.



The Warmian-Masurian Provincial Headquarters of the Voluntary Labour Corps (*Warmińsko-Mazurska Wojewódzka Komenda Ochotniczych Hufców Pracy, OHP*) — various OHP units provide young people with support in education, vocational training, and career counselling. The staff of this institution shared their experiences in organizing activation programs that combine learning with practical professional experience. Their methods of supporting youth, especially those facing educational and social difficulties, can serve as a valuable source of inspiration for other activation programs.

The Office for People with Disabilities at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (*Biuro ds. Osób Niepełnosprawnych na Uniwersytecie Warmińsko-Mazurskim w Olsztynie*) — plays a crucial role in providing educational and social support to students with disabilities. Its tasks cover a wide range of activities essential for the full integration of these students into the academic environment and preparing them for active participation in the job market after graduation. An interview with the staff of this office provided valuable insights into best practices in the following areas:

- Educational support: m.in. What forms of educational and technological support are available to students with disabilities? What are the most effective methods for adapting educational materials and adjusting classes and exams?
- Career counselling: How does the office assist students in planning their careers, organizing internships, and finding jobs after graduation?
- Social integration: What programs and initiatives support the social integration of students with disabilities at the university? What actions are taken to promote awareness and acceptance within the academic community?
- Collaboration with other institutions: How does the Office cooperate with local and regional organizations, employers, and institutions that support persons with disabilities? What are some examples of successful partnerships?

The Career Advisor at the Economic and Trade School Complex No. 2 in Olsztyn (*Szkolny doradca zawodowy w Zespole Szkół Ekonomiczno-Handlowych Nr 2 w Olsztynie*) — operates using the Job Coaching method. Career advisors are involved at every stage of education, including informal education such as organizing courses and training. Their role is crucial in the process of placing students and graduates into the job market, which is why it was considered important to highlight innovations in this area. A career advisor in the vocational education and training (VET) sector using the Job Coaching method was selected. The Job Coaching method includes individualized support for

individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment, tailoring the learning and practical process to their specific needs and abilities. Conversations with such an advisor provided valuable insights into effective support strategies, career path personalization, and vocational integration. VET career advisors have a unique perspective on labour market needs and job requirements, allowing them to precisely match participants' capabilities with available job opportunities. Their experience in practical vocational training and individual support is invaluable in understanding how best to prepare persons with disabilities for entering the job market and achieving career success.

Summary

Interviews with employees from the Municipal Labour Office in Olsztyn, the Educational Institutions Complex in Olsztyn, the Warmian-Masurian Provincial Headquarters of the Voluntary Labour Corps, the Warmian-Masurian Assembly of Persons with Disabilities, a VET sector career advisor, the Office for People with Disabilities at the University of Warmia and Mazury, and the Activation Foundation provided a comprehensive overview of best practices in the vocational activation of persons with disabilities and those in difficult life situations. Each of these institutions brings unique experiences and approaches that can be leveraged to develop effective and integrated support programs, with a particular emphasis on internships and vocational placements, which will contribute to better integration into the job market.

3.3 Selected Vocational Activation Units in Italy

The collection of best practices in the field of employment mediation for persons with disabilities was prepared with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders from social and vocational integration services. It included public social services and employment services employees, as well as social workers and specialists from private companies and non-governmental organizations focused on integration issues. This collaborative approach ensured that the practices reflect diverse perspectives and expertise, leading to more comprehensive and effective support strategies for the professional inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

The Public Employment Office in Verbania — plays a crucial role in the public vocational system aimed at supporting persons with disabilities. By providing an overview of the functioning of the public vocational system, this centre helps identify effective practices in job mediation and the integration of persons with disabilities. Interviews with the centre's staff shed light on their strategies for addressing the specific needs of job seekers with disabilities, including personalized support, career counselling, and collaboration with employers to facilitate successful job placement.

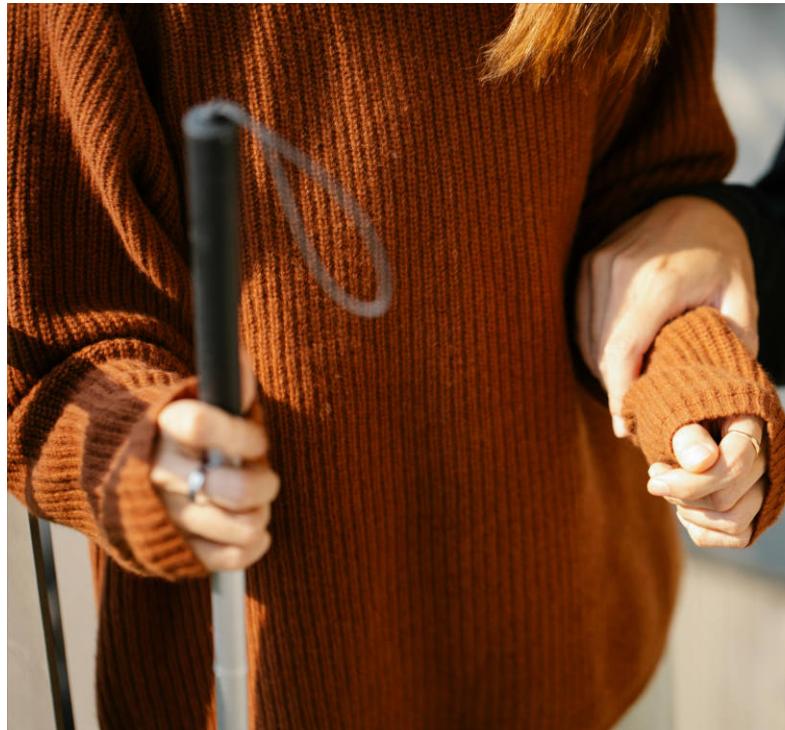
The Intermunicipal Consortium for Social Services in the Province of Verbania — provides insights into how social services contribute to the vocational integration of disadvantaged individuals. This consortium serves as an example of best practices in cross-sectoral cooperation between social services, public employment offices, and private job placement services. Particularly noteworthy is the consortium's ability to go beyond a purely welfare-based approach, offering comprehensive support to persons with disabilities seeking employment. Their efforts to foster cooperation between businesses, institutions, and associations play a key role in reducing social costs while enhancing the skills and employment prospects of their clients.

The Intermunicipal Consortium for the Provision of Social Services in the Province of Verbano Cusio Ossola — public organization recognized as a best practice due to its innovative approach to social and vocational integration. Moving beyond a welfare-based model, the consortium provides opportunities for social and vocational integration for persons with disabilities and those in disadvantaged situations. Their programs focus on enhancing clients' skills through improved collaboration between businesses, institutions, and associations. This approach not only supports clients in finding employment but also helps reduce social costs by fostering a more inclusive labour market.

The We4Job Network— supported by the Aurive social cooperative from Novara, collaborates with vocational schools and technical institutes. It is regarded as a best practice due to its ability to strengthen the dialogue between educational institutions and the socio-economic environment, addressing the gap between labour supply and demand. The network's initiatives guide both employers and job seekers more effectively, facilitating successful job mediation. This collaboration ensures that vocational training is aligned with market needs, thereby increasing employment opportunities for graduates, including those with disabilities.

IPSASR Fobelli — Agricultural Vocational High School Institute — serves as a model for integrating young persons with disabilities into the agricultural sector. This vocational high school is known for combining work-based and non-formal learning, teaching both hard and soft skills. Their comprehensive approach includes vocational training in school laboratories, non-formal educational experiences through Erasmus mobility projects, and internships. This blend of educational experiences enhances the employability of students with disabilities by providing them with practical skills useful in the agricultural industry.

The Differenza Social Cooperative — in collaboration with Aurive, manages a project funded by the Chiesa Valdese Foundation that focuses on post-graduation vocational internships for disadvantaged individuals, particularly students with disabilities. The project includes a series of integrated activities such as information and counselling services, school-to-work transition programs, and non-formal education aimed at increasing employment prospects. This holistic approach helps newly graduated students with disabilities transition into the job market, making it a significant example of effective employment mediation practices.



The *Exar Social Cooperative* — is involved in several social innovation projects aimed at increasing employment rates among disadvantaged groups, including young persons with disabilities. These initiatives focus on reducing professional inactivity among youth under 35 who face difficulties entering the labour market. Exar activation of job mediation services within social services, especially for individuals with mental health conditions, has significantly increased employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Their collaboration with public employment offices ensures compliance with legal requirements regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities and helps companies fulfil these obligations.

Abile Job — private company known for its innovative training programs designed to facilitate employment for disadvantaged individuals. Their comprehensive approach includes training company staff to promote cultural development concerning disability and social challenges. *Abile Job* team of experts in research, recruitment, training, coaching, mediation, and social projects leverages an extensive network of business, association, and institutional contacts. This enables them to design and manage effective programs that support the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market.

Summary

Interviews with employees from the Public Employment Office in Verbania, the Intermunicipal Social Service Consortia in the provinces of Verbania and Verbano Cusio Ossola, the *We4Job* network, *IPSASR Fobelli*, *Differenza* Social Cooperative, *Exar* Social Cooperative, and *Abile Job* provided a comprehensive picture of best practices in job mediation for persons with disabilities. Each institution offers unique experiences and approaches that contribute to the development of effective and integrated support programs. By emphasizing internships and vocational placements, these activities help improve the employment prospects of persons with disabilities, enhancing both their job opportunities and social integration.

4. Best Practices in Poland and Italy

4.1 Best Practices in Employment Mediation for People with Disabilities and Those in Difficult Situations — Poland

We present a set of Best Practices that showcase the most effective solutions in the field of professional activation, particularly in the area of job placement for people with disabilities and those in difficult life situations. These examples come from both Poland and Italy, offering proven methods for supporting employment and integration into the labour market.

4.1.1 Activation Foundation (*Fundacja Aktywizacja*)

Participants/ Recipients:	Office of the Capital City of Warsaw Social Insurance Institution (<i>Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, ZUS</i>) Marshal's Offices (<i>Urząd Marszałkowski</i>)
Type of Solution:	„Best Practices in Employing People with Disabilities. A Handbook for Local Governments” The handbook was developed as part of the project "Equal Opportunities – Equal Work," implemented under the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021. The handbook is aimed at both large and small public administration entities. It offers solutions specifically tailored to the context of public administration, presenting best practices that can serve as inspiration for similar initiatives in businesses and the third sector.
Objectives:	Vocational activation of persons with disabilities. Increasing the involvement of local governments in the vocational activation of persons

with disabilities could contribute to the stable employment of individuals with disabilities in Poland.

This includes equalizing opportunities for persons with disabilities in the recruitment process, creating better working conditions for them, and equipping public administration employees with the skills to work with individuals with disabilities. Additionally, an important aspect of the project was the effective management of diverse teams in a way that ensures equal opportunities, leverages potential, and provides optimal working conditions, taking into account the specific needs and abilities related to disabilities.

Implementation:

The handbook addresses several key questions:

Can persons with disabilities work in public offices in any position? How can you prepare for their employment? How do you integrate them into a team? How do you assess their work and provide conditions for development? Additionally, the publication explains definitions and introduces concepts we encounter daily but may not fully understand.

For example:

1. The guide discusses universal design, expanding its meaning beyond the narrow architectural definition. In this context, universal design encompasses a broader perspective, focusing on designing environments, procedures, and work organizations that are accessible to all, without the need for additional measures or special adaptations. Universal design refers to a range of activities aimed at creating an environment that accommodates individuals with diverse special needs, allowing them to enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others.

2. The term “**people with special needs**” is a broad category that extends beyond the concept of “persons with disabilities.” According to the definition in the law of 19 July 2019, on ensuring accessibility for people

with special needs, this group includes various individuals, such as pregnant women, parents with strollers, elderly people, children, those carrying heavy luggage, individuals with temporary impairments (e.g., due to an accident), and many others.

3. Each person with a disability is unique, and even two people with the same type of disability can function very differently. These functional differences apply to all groups of persons with disabilities. It is essential to remember and consider these individual differences when organizing the workplace and integrating individuals into the organization.

It's also important to remember that many disabilities are invisible, such as mental disorders, neurological diseases, internal organ conditions, and hearing impairments. Awareness and knowledge are key to recognizing these invisible disabilities and providing appropriate support to those experiencing them.

To enhance the understanding of different types of disabilities, the publication also includes a range of guides and other useful materials. These resources aim to further educate readers and provide practical insights into adapting the workplace for individuals with special needs. Links to these resources can be found later in the description of best practices, as recommended by the authors.

4. The publication also introduces guidelines for interacting with persons with disabilities, which facilitate cooperation in both daily life and professional settings. Here are some of them:

- Address the person directly, even if they are using an assistant or interpreter.
- If you're talking to someone in a wheelchair, take a step back or sit down. Out of respect, avoid leaning over them.
- If the person speaks unclearly, focus on what they are saying, and if you don't understand something, ask them to repeat it. Never pretend to understand or guess what they are saying.

- Ensure your conversation partner is comfortable. If you're speaking with someone who is hard of hearing, provide a quiet environment and avoid standing in bright light, as it can make lip-reading difficult.
- If your conversation partner is blind, give precise information. Avoid phrases like "here" or "there." Instead, describe locations using directional references, such as "at 3 o'clock" or "to the left." If you don't understand a term, feel free to ask.
- A wheelchair, crutches, or cane are personal items of the person with disabilities. Do not move them without permission or lean on them.
- Avoid expressing pity or labelling someone as a hero — for example, the desire to live a regular life and secure a job is not heroic, but an everyday aspiration.
- Avoid surprising a blind person or touching them without warning.
- Behave naturally, and if you're unsure how to act, don't hesitate to ask.

5. The handbook also highlights **the aspects that persons with disabilities focus on** and the barriers they encounter in the workplace. These barriers include:

Physical environment barriers, such as:

- Workplace location not accessible by public transport,
- Lack of designated parking spaces,
- Stairs leading to the entrance,
- Desks, shelves, handles, and light switches positioned too high,
- Lack of information presented in different formats, such as audio, visual, or written,
- Absence of translation into Polish Sign Language (PJM),
- Materials written in overly complex language,
- Echoes, noise, and distracting sounds (e.g., from the radio),
- Inadequate lighting,
- Lack of contrasting and clear signage for buildings and rooms,

- The need to use equipment that requires significant strength or precise movements.

Attitudinal barriers, such as:

- Stereotypes about persons with disabilities, which can lead to discrimination,
- Biases affecting teamwork,
- False beliefs about the ability of persons with disabilities to perform work tasks.

Organizational barriers in the workplace, such as:

- Inflexible procedures,
- Lack of access to assistance from an assistant or specialist to help adapt to the workplace.

6. Rights arising from disability include:

- Adjustment of working hours for persons with disabilities,
- Exemptions from certain work requirements,
- Breaks during working hours,
- Additional holiday leave,
- Rehabilitation leave.

7. Benefits of employing persons with disabilities:

Public entities cannot receive funding for employing persons with disabilities from the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON). However, they can benefit from a reduction in the mandatory PFRON contribution if they do not meet the requirement of employing at least 6% of people with disabilities. In some cases, they may even qualify for full exemption from this contribution, resulting in financial savings for the entity.

8. Coordination of accessibility regulated by law.

The Act of 19 July 2019, on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs imposes an obligation on public entities to ensure accessibility. The

level of required accessibility in architectural, digital, and communication/information areas is described in this act and in the Act of 4 April 2019, on digital accessibility of public sector websites and mobile applications.

9. When recruiting employees with disabilities, **the employer should consider:**

- Analysing staffing needs,
- Ways and channels to reach potential employees with disabilities,
- Accessibility of the recruitment process from the job advertisement, through possible knowledge tests, to the interview.

10. The workplace adaptation process is as follows:

- The process of onboarding newly hired individuals with special needs,
- The role of the supervisor, the team, and the adaptation supervisor.

11. Attention was drawn to **managing a diverse team, emphasizing the needs of all team members, and supporting effective internal communication within the organization.**

Diversity management aims to create an inclusive work environment where each person is valued. Implementing equality in the workplace involves recognizing the unique characteristics of male and female employees and actively preventing stigmatization and exclusion. This proactive and attentive approach optimally leverages diverse talents for organizational growth and strategic success. A well-implemented diversity management policy plays a key role in cultivating a work culture based on respect.

Transparent internal communication not only enhances alignment with the organization's initiatives but also reduces conflicts arising from differences in how team members operate and work. When hiring a person with a disability, managers should familiarize the team with the rights granted

to the employee under legal regulations. This topic should be part of the guidelines for team collaboration, ensuring clarity that these rights are based on legal provisions and do not constitute unequal treatment of other colleagues.

Monitoring task distribution and workload balance among team members is essential. It is important to quickly address any discrepancies with appropriate corrective measures. Effective management of a diverse team requires skilful allocation of resources and delegation of tasks to fully utilize the potential of the entire team, including employees with disabilities.

An integral part of integrating a person with a disability into the team is assessing the workplace's adaptation to their specific needs and abilities. Direct consultation with the individual is crucial to clear up any concerns. Additionally, it is significant to inquire about the need for any additional equipment or software that could facilitate work and communication within the team.

12. Organization of Working Conditions

The obligation to adapt workstations arises from the Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities. According to this law, a workstation adapted for a person with disabilities must be equipped and tailored to the specific needs resulting from the type and degree of disability.

Many persons with disabilities may not require significant adjustments to their workstations. In some cases, simple and cost-effective solutions are sufficient, such as:

- Installing a free instant messaging platform.
- Using the magnifier tool, which is a standard feature in operating systems.
- Arranging the workspace to maximize freedom of movement and removing obstacles from pathways.

- Establishing an internal communication system between deaf and hearing individuals (e.g., using cards with symbols representing different needs).

These solutions help create an inclusive and accessible work environment without imposing significant financial burdens on employers.

13. Professional Development and Promotion

Employers should prioritize the professional development and promotion opportunities of persons with disabilities, as well as continuously monitor retention rates and training needs.

All employees should have equal opportunities to improve their professional qualifications, expand the knowledge and skills necessary for effectively performing their duties, and develop additional competencies to advance in their careers.

Outcomes Projected:

Increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities, job retention, and job satisfaction.

Case Study:

Example 1 of a Best Practice from a Marshal's Office

In one of the marshal's offices, a person with a disability was hired in the department responsible for evaluating and implementing projects funded by EU resources. Shortly after their employment, there was a noticeable increase in awareness regarding the integration of persons with disabilities and the universal design of all products developed within the EU-funded projects. This positive change not only impacted the projects directly overseen by the new employee but also influenced all other projects within the office.

After the hiring of a colleague who uses a wheelchair, the organization's staff began prioritizing accessibility in the projects submitted by grant

recipients. They also increased the focus on accessibility during training sessions and became more diligent in evaluating this aspect in submitted projects. The presence of a person with a disability provided a tangible representation of accessibility, making the concept clearer and more relevant to the team. While sensitivity to the needs of persons with disabilities exists even without directly employing persons with disabilities, having such individuals on the team greatly enriches understanding and awareness.

Example 2 of a Best Practice from a Marshal's Office

After hiring a deaf employee in one of the departments, the supervisor organized a **team meeting** aimed at fostering mutual understanding and integration. During a short training session, two presenters addressed the team: an expert from a non-governmental organization specializing in issues related to deaf people, and the new employee themselves. The expert provided insights into social dynamics and the importance of sign language, along with basic guidelines on etiquette when interacting with deaf individuals. The new employee actively participated by teaching colleagues basic phrases in Polish Sign Language.

The meeting concluded with an interactive Q&A session involving both presenters, after which communication protocols were established. These included the use of online sign language interpreters, written communication, and incorporating sign language gestures into daily interactions.

Example 1 of a Best Practice from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS)

The Social Insurance Institution demonstrated its commitment to promoting accessibility by creating a dedicated role: **a coordinator for the employment of persons with disabilities**. This role focuses on increasing the employment of persons with disabilities within the organization and supporting their integration with other staff members. The coordinator is

also responsible for activities related to the ongoing process of increasing the employment of persons with disabilities and advocating for their inclusion.

Example 2 of a Best Practice from the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS)

The Social Insurance Institution conducted an audit to **assess the suitability of workstations for people with specific disabilities**. The audit examined the possibility of employing individuals with disabilities and identified the necessary adaptations for workstations. It was determined that nearly every position at the Social Insurance Institution could be filled by persons with disabilities, with some limitations based on the type of disability.

Example 1 of a Best Practice from the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw

The Office of the Capital City of Warsaw utilizes **internships and work placements** as effective tools to support persons with a disability certificate who are registered at employment offices as jobseekers. These internships are funded by PFRON and typically last from 3 to 6 months. In addition, the office offers paid graduate internships, some of which are reserved exclusively for persons with a disability certificate. These programs provide valuable professional experience and insight into the office's operations, thus increasing participants' readiness for permanent employment within the office.

Example 2 of a Best Practice from the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw

The Office of the Capital City of Warsaw launched **an internal portal with a section called "ABC for New Employees."** This resource includes the "Welcome to the Office" handbook and presentations from orientation training conducted on the first day of work. The constantly updated portal

serves as a comprehensive information hub for all employees, supervisors, and adaptation coordinators, facilitating smoother integration into the work environment.

Example 3 of a Best Practice from the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw

The Activation Foundation organized a field game called "Diversity Training Ground" for the employees of the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw. Participants engaged in simulations to experience the daily barriers faced by people with various disabilities. They had the opportunity to participate in activities such as archery, navigating obstacles in a wheelchair, communicating using the Lorm alphabet, and experiencing tunnel vision through VR goggles. The goal was to raise awareness and sensitivity to the needs of persons with disabilities and discuss the challenges of integration within organizations.

Example 4 of a Best Practice from the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw

The Office of the Capital City of Warsaw collaborated with a digital accessibility expert to analyze and implement the WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines in its e-learning training programs. Recognizing the importance of providing accessible training to all employees via its platform, the office aimed to increase the digital accessibility of its e-learning modules. The analysis revealed that many accessibility challenges stemmed from limitations in existing programs and applications, which hindered full compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA standards.

Despite these challenges, the office successfully developed comprehensive guidelines, a handbook for e-learning developers, and a checklist. These tools play a crucial role during the procurement, production, and approval stages of e-learning projects. First, they help the office formulate requests

for proposals and contracts that prioritize accessibility. Second, they assist contractors in understanding and implementing accessibility standards in e-learning design, offering a step-by-step approach. Third, they enable a thorough evaluation of outcomes against accessibility criteria before final approval (using the checklist).

This initiative was part of the "Equal Opportunities – Equal Work" project, reflecting the office's commitment to ensuring equal access and opportunities through accessible digital training.

Example 5 of a Best Practice from the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw

The Human Resources and Training Office of the Office of the Capital City of Warsaw developed an informational presentation for employees, focusing on the rights of persons with disabilities in the workplace. It provides comprehensive information on both internal and external legal regulations. The presentation covers topics such as working hours, breaks, holiday leave, paid leave, and other important HR policies aimed at supporting employees with disabilities.

4.1.2 The Municipal Labour Office in Olsztyn (*Miejski Urząd Pracy w Olsztynie, MUP*)

Participants/	The Municipal Labour Office in Olsztyn;
Recipients:	Potential Employers
Type of Solution:	Job Fair (Annual Edition)
Objectives:	Vocational activation of students, school graduates, and employed individuals with disabilities.

Public institutions present the forms and possibilities of support for employers planning to hire persons with disabilities, as well as the economic benefits that result from this.

Implementation:

Job fairs are events organized to connect employers with potential employees who are looking for jobs or seeking to change their career path. They provide a dynamic environment where representatives from various industries and jobseekers can exchange information, build professional networks, and explore employment opportunities.

In its activities, the Municipal Labour Office (MUP) has increased its focus on facilitating connections between employers and individuals with disabilities.

Promotion of job fairs takes place through multiple channels. Unemployed individuals visiting the employment office are informed and invited to participate in the event. Information about the fairs and the participating exhibitors is also shared on the employment office's website and social media. Vocational education and training institutions receive regular updates about upcoming events, such as job fairs and job exchanges, along with invitations to participate. Over the past two years, the Educational Institutions Complex (ZPE) for persons with disabilities up to 25 years old has been a regular participant in these fairs.

Typically, the following activities take place during job fairs:

- 1. Company Presentations:** The fairs begin with presentations from the participating companies. Each company has a booth where representatives showcase job offers, company culture, and career development opportunities.
- 2. Meetings with Employers:** Participants have the opportunity to meet directly with company representatives. They can inquire about job specifics, exchange contact information, and submit their CVs.

3. **Presentations and Workshops:** Job fairs often include presentations and workshops covering various job search techniques, career development strategies, and professional skills. Companies may also present sessions highlighting their operations and employment opportunities.
4. **On-site Recruitment:** Some companies conduct on-site recruitment during the fair. This allows participants to attend interviews or directly fill out job application forms.
5. **Networking:** Job fairs offer an excellent platform for networking with industry professionals, other participants, and recruitment experts. It's an opportunity to share insights, experiences, and gain inspiration related to career development.
6. **Labour Market Information:** Job fairs provide participants with up-to-date information about the labour market, including job market trends and employer expectations. This information helps participants better prepare for their job search and career planning.

In addition, government institutions such as the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON) and the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) are invited. These institutions play a key role in supporting jobseekers, particularly persons with disabilities, and present the rules and benefits of employing persons with disabilities.

PFRON Presentation:

Representatives from these organizations highlight the programs and support available for persons with disabilities in the employment sector, including:

- **Discussion of training and retraining programs:** Programs aimed at preparing individuals with disabilities for employment through training and retraining initiatives.

- **Information about financial support:** Explanation of various forms of financial support for employers who hire persons with disabilities.
- **Success stories:** Examples of persons with disabilities who have successfully found employment thanks to PFRON's support.
- **Employment tips:** Advice on employment opportunities tailored to individuals with different types of disabilities.

ZUS Presentation:

During job fairs, ZUS provides essential information on social insurance, pensions, disability benefits, and social assistance, offering comprehensive details, including:

1. **Types of social insurance and benefits:** ZUS explains the different forms of social insurance available, such as pensions, disability benefits, sickness benefits, and others.
2. **Contribution obligations:** Information on the responsibilities of both employers and employees regarding social insurance contributions.
3. **Guidance on ZUS services:** ZUS offers practical advice on using their services, including tips on registering for social insurance, applying for benefits, and other related procedures.

The presence of PFRON and ZUS at job fairs is highly valuable for participants, both for employers and persons with disabilities, who can obtain important information and support regarding employment, social security, rights, and obligations, as well as learn about best practices.

Job fairs also provide an opportunity for employers to network with other employers who offer employment to persons with disabilities, allowing them to compare experiences. It is also a place where interested potential employees can hear from other individuals with disabilities who have already found employment, learn about the work culture at a particular company, or ask questions on topics that interest them.

Networking initiatives, such as job fairs, play a crucial role in enabling direct contact between jobseekers and employers with vacancies. They help

	<p>resolve uncertainties on both sides. Employers learn what modifications would be essential to hiring graduates with disabilities, while graduates have access to numerous employment opportunities in one place, are introduced to various industries, and have the chance to be recruited directly during the event, rather than waiting for feedback after submitting a CV.</p> <p>Both companies and persons with disabilities (graduates and students) can find similar initiatives on Employment Office websites, as these are typically recurring events.</p>
Outcomes Projected:	Increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities.
Case Study:	<p>At the 2023 Job Fair in Olsztyn, Wioletta Wielachowska's Accounting Office, a company specializing in finance and accounting, offered the opportunity for vocational or higher education graduates to undertake an internship as an office assistant. After learning about the potential funding from PFRON and the benefits of employing persons with disabilities, the office owner decided to offer an internship to Mr. Krzysztof, who uses a wheelchair.</p> <p>Krzysztof successfully passed the recruitment process and began a six-month internship in June 2023. Upon completing the internship, he was offered a permanent position as an accountant at the office. His responsibilities include tasks such as entering data into the accounting system, archiving financial documents, preparing reports, monitoring client document transfers, recording bank reconciliation, and tracking payment deadlines. Thanks to the Job Fair, a person with a disability was matched with an employer who provided employment tailored to the needs of the employee. Both the employer's and the employee's needs were met. Mobility limitations do not necessarily mean an inability to work, especially in office environments.</p>

The job fairs organized by the Employment Office in Olsztyn have a positive impact on the activation of persons with disabilities. Among the advantages, we can point out:

1. Networking:

- People with disabilities have the opportunity to meet directly with multiple employers in one place.
- They can connect with other jobseekers, exchanging experiences and information.
- They meet representatives from organizations that support persons with disabilities in the labour market.

2. Building relationships:

- Direct contact with employers helps break down barriers and stereotypes.
- Persons with disabilities can showcase their skills and personality beyond the formal recruitment process.
- Employers have a chance to better understand the individual needs and capabilities of Persons with disabilities.

3. Access to information:

- Persons with disabilities receive up-to-date information on job offers tailored to their needs.
- They can learn about support programs and training offered by various institutions.
- They gain insights into employer requirements and trends in the local job market.

4. Motivation and confidence:

- Participation in the job fair can be an important step in overcoming social isolation.
- Success in networking increases the confidence of Persons with disabilities.
- The fair's atmosphere fosters a positive attitude toward job searching.

5. Employer education:

- Employers have the chance to discover the potential of Persons with disabilities as employees.
- They receive information on the benefits and support related to employing Persons with disabilities.
- They learn how to adapt workplaces to the needs of Persons with disabilities.

6. Promotion of supported employment:

- Job fairs provide a platform to showcase the successes of supported employment programs.
- Persons with disabilities can meet job coaches and learn about available support opportunities.

7. Development of soft skills:

- Persons with disabilities develop their communication skills.
- They practice presenting their abilities in a short amount of time.
- They learn to cope with stress in professional situations.

8. Social integration:

- Job fairs contribute to greater visibility of Persons with disabilities in public spaces.
- They promote the integration of Persons with disabilities with the local community.
- They show that Persons with disabilities are an active part of the open labour market.

9. Inspiration and experience sharing:

- Persons with disabilities can meet persons who have achieved professional success despite their disability.
- Exchanging experiences with other Persons with disabilities can provide new ideas for career development.

10. Long-term effects:

- Connections made during the fair may lead to future employment.

- Regular participation in fairs builds a professional network for Persons with disabilities.
- Employers, recognizing the potential of Persons with disabilities, may be more inclined to hire them in the future.

Job fairs are an important tool in the vocational activation of Persons with disabilities, contributing to their social integration.

4.1.3 The Educational Institutions Complex in Olsztyn (Zespół Placówek Edukacyjnych w Olsztynie, ZPE)

Institution:	The Educational Institutions Complex in Olsztyn (ZPE)
Type of Solution:	Internal procedures for organizing vocational internships for students and internships for school graduates.
Objectives:	Vocational activation of students and graduates of ZPE.
Implementation:	<p>Discussion on the possibilities of vocational internships for students.</p> <p>A presentation of opportunities to explore various career paths and gain practical skills, including both the technical aspects of production work and areas related to management, marketing, and customer service.</p> <p>Discussion of the basic knowledge required in the industry and readiness to collaborate with the company's teams.</p> <p>Review of the internship schedule and all administrative formalities that need to be completed before the start of the internship.</p> <p>Setting the schedule for practical exercises.</p>

	<p>Approval of the internship program, which includes both practical tasks and theoretical training.</p> <p>Discussion of potential projects that students will work on and career opportunities within the company.</p>
Outcomes Projected:	Organizing school internships for students and internships for graduates of ZPE to increase the employment of persons with disabilities.
Case Study:	<p>ZPE students are primarily individuals with moderate or significant disabilities. ZPE staff often encounter reluctance from employers when attempting to organize vocational internships for students. An analysis reveals several reasons for this behaviour:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Administrative and logistical burdens: Employers are concerned about the additional effort and costs associated with providing appropriate working conditions for persons with disabilities. Adapting the workplace to specific needs can be challenging, especially for employers who have no prior experience in accommodating individuals with disabilities. 2. Concerns about perceived productivity: Employers often worry about the perceived lower productivity of employees with disabilities. They fear they may need to invest more time and resources in training and supervising these employees, potentially affecting profitability. 3. Prejudices and stereotypes: In some cases, biases, or stereotypes about persons with disabilities influence employers' decisions. These prejudices can lead to the perception of lower competencies or abilities among persons with disabilities, potentially limiting their opportunities to work in their chosen profession. 4. Lack of awareness and understanding: Many employers are simply unaware of the benefits of employing persons with disabilities or the available support mechanisms that could help them accommodate the needs of these employees.

As a result of these concerns, employers who agreed to organize internships often assigned students to simpler tasks, such as cleaning, gardening, kitchen assistance, or childcare. However, due to the persistence of the school administration, significant progress was made in 2024. An agreement was signed with OLMEX KMB sp. z o.o., based in Wójtowo, to organize vocational internships for the students.

OLMEX KMB sp. z o.o. operates in the energy sector, specializing in reactive power compensation, particularly through the production of capacitor banks.

Students are involved in the following areas:

- Technical support — they participate in monitoring reactive power compensation systems, such as capacitor banks, reporting malfunctions, and diagnosing technical issues.
- Logistical support — they assist in inventory management, warehouse operations, organizing shipments, and preparing packages for dispatch.
- Testing and quality control — students are engaged in testing products or components to ensure they meet quality standards and identify any defects.

The involvement of students with disabilities in a manufacturing company in the energy sector can be considered a best practice worth replicating. Here are the key elements of the internships:

- **Vocational integration** — the company actively engages students with disabilities, offering them real-world experience in a work environment.
- **Task adaptation** — the practice emphasizes matching duties to the individual skills and needs of the students, maximizing their potential.
- **Mutual benefits** — the program benefits both the students

(experience, skill development) and the company (increased diversity, inclusive culture).

1. **Long-term perspective:** the practice opens up possibilities for permanent employment, which is crucial for sustained vocational integration.
2. **Inclusive culture:** the company promotes a work environment based on openness and tolerance, serving as a valuable model for other organizations.
3. **Personal development of students:** the program supports not only vocational development but also interpersonal skills and independence for the students.
4. **Collaboration model:** the practice demonstrates how companies can effectively collaborate with students with disabilities, creating value for both sides.

To replicate this best practice, it is important to:

- establish partnerships with local schools or vocational training centres for persons with disabilities. Teachers, career counsellors, and administration staff are key players whose networking skills will be crucial in building relationships with local companies. It would be necessary to enhance their qualifications and support networking—not only with companies, but also with other schools that have more experience in organizing internships and work placements.
- Identify areas within the company where students could work and develop effectively. Seek out companies that align with the professions taught at the school. Everyone involved in the execution of internships and placements should participate in actively finding willing companies. Students themselves may also propose where they would like to gain practical experience.
- Prepare the team to welcome and support students with disabilities. In collaboration with the company, the school must prepare a flexible

internship or placement program that takes into account the individual needs of persons with disabilities. This may include adjustments for mobility limitations, the introduction of inclusive language, and outlining specific strengths as well as limitations stemming from disabilities.

- Provide appropriate support and mentoring for program participants. The school, particularly the internship supervisor, should offer support to students participating in the program. Both strengths and areas for improvement should be reported to the school so that, in agreement with the company, the quality of the program can be enhanced.
- Regularly evaluate and adjust the program to maximize benefits for all parties. Each group completing an internship or placement will have unique needs and insights. It is important to gather feedback so that, with the experience of both the school and the company, the program can be continuously improved.

This practice serves as an inspiring model of vocational integration that can be adapted by other schools and companies, regardless of the industry, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive labour market.

4.1.4 The Warmian-Masurian Assembly of People with Disabilities (*Warmińsko-Mazurski Sejmik Osób Niepełnosprawnych, WMSON*)

Participants/ Recipients:	The Warmian-Masurian Assembly of People with Disabilities
Type of Solution:	Supported employment. A service provided for individuals who face difficulties entering the labour market and maintaining employment – funded by PFRON (State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons).
Objectives:	A method of working with persons with disabilities aimed at facilitating their access to employment and helping them maintain paid employment in the open labour market.
Implementation:	<p>The Warmian-Masurian Assembly of People with Disabilities (WMSON) primarily works using the Supported Employment method, aimed at helping persons with disabilities.</p> <p>Supported Employment (SE) is designed for individuals with a disability certificate, regardless of the degree of disability (mild, moderate, or severe). People with mild disabilities typically make up about 5% of participants.</p> <p>The stages of Supported Employment at WMSON include recruitment, assessment (skills analysis), profiling, solution design, and support in maintaining employment. In Poland, Supported Employment is not yet widely used, so it is important to inform both persons with disabilities (Persons with disabilities) seeking employment and employers about the advantages of this support method.</p> <p>Work at WMSON is carried out by a team consisting of a job coach, career counsellor, and psychologist, with project managers overseeing the activities.</p>

The Assembly emphasizes an individual approach to each client. They analyse the strengths, experiences, skills, and education of Persons with disabilities to enhance them, and then support clients in entering the job market. A key part of the work is employment monitoring—supporting Persons with disabilities after they begin employment.

The first contact with a client involves an interview, during which information about the client is gathered: what they can do, their experience, work history, and education. This interview rarely happens in just one meeting; it takes time to gather the necessary information about the competencies and capabilities of Persons with disabilities. After getting to know the client better, the WMSON team decides which tools to use to activate the individual.

WMSON offers opportunities such as internships and vocational training, which help strengthen the client's skills before they take on proper employment.

In getting to know a person with a disability, WMSON's job coaches can utilize not only their knowledge or experience but also their passions. One example involved a young man who, after finishing his studies, struggled to find his place in the job market. During one of the meetings, he brought hand-drawn maps of buses and trams to his coach, revealing his passion and skills. The coach helped him find a job at the local road management unit.

To achieve success, the coach must believe that the person with a disability wants and is capable of securing paid employment. Building the participant's self-confidence is crucial. The coach works with the person with a disability not only until they begin an internship, but also throughout the internship and even after they secure a job. The individual receives support from the entire WMSON team throughout the project.

WMSON tailors job proposals to the competencies of persons with disabilities. Each coach searches for job offers individually for each

participant (client) and personally contacts employers to discuss employment opportunities.

WMSON also utilizes available job offers from online portals, the Employment Office, and direct submissions. Each coach handles 8–10 clients, whose abilities they know well, and they match available offers from the database to them. Coaches also exchange job offers among themselves to ensure as many people as possible can take advantage of available opportunities.

WMSON implements projects that are internally written and approved, directed toward PFRON and funded by the EU. The beneficiaries of these projects are persons with disabilities, who are involved in the project for a period of one to 2–3 years, depending on the length of the project. In some cases, after just two months, it's clear what internship or training can be proposed to the client, while in other cases, even after 10 months, it's still being determined what the best solution might be.

Thanks to the long period of cooperation (from one year to as long as three years), there is ample time to help a person with a disability open up to new opportunities. The process of social activation sometimes takes longer than finding a job itself, but the intensive work of the entire team helps secure and build stable job positions for persons with disabilities.

WMSON encounters a wide range of professional backgrounds, from individuals just entering the job market after completing their studies to those who have had a long break from work for various reasons, such as disorders, anxiety, long-term rehabilitation, or the need for retraining after an accident.

Initially, WMSON provided job placement services, but it quickly became apparent that this form of activation was not yielding the desired results. Therefore, they began searching for new methods of vocational activation, drawing from the experiences of other countries. Publications highlighted the effectiveness of Supported Employment, leading representatives from

WMSON to visit institutions in Germany, Scotland, and Hungary to deepen their knowledge and learn about best practices.

Over time, the projects began to specialize, for example, focusing more on social activation to prepare persons with disabilities for entering the job market and accepting earlier forms of vocational activation.

In implementing Supported Employment, WMSON observed that individuals with disabilities often need time to open up to new opportunities. This allows the job coaches to better understand them and guide them more effectively throughout the vocational activation process. As part of their participation in Supported Employment, individuals with disabilities decide whether they agree to the proposed form of support, which ensures their psychological comfort.

Social activation typically starts with simple activities, such as learning how to navigate the city, developing independence, and building responsibility.

WMSON is continually increasing the number of employed job coaches. The organization is a member of the Polish Union of Supported Employment. WMSON staff regularly expand their qualifications, and during team meetings, they discuss best practices and share experiences, allowing for more effective support of persons with disabilities.

Regular work meetings are held for job coaches, during which they exchange knowledge, job offer databases, experiences, challenges, and new ideas. The trainings are funded as part of various projects. In addition to internships, WMSON also offers vocational training tailored to individual needs, such as forklift courses or IT training, with the decision to refer someone to a specific training made by the job coach.

One of the challenges WMSON faces is the barriers employers encounter in hiring persons with disabilities, primarily due to fears and a lack of understanding of the issues faced by these individuals. The first contact

between the job coach and the employer is therefore crucial to understanding these barriers and helping to overcome or accept them without disrupting the work of others. Job coaches also assist coworkers in understanding and accepting a colleague's disability and help integrate the person into the team.

Another issue arises with occupational health doctors, who do not always believe in the employment potential of persons with disabilities. In some cases, they may even negatively impact the motivation of individuals with disabilities to work. WMSON coaches strive to represent the interests of project participants, helping them obtain employment opportunities and convincing employers that a person with a disability can be a valuable employee.

WMSON takes great satisfaction from the successes achieved through Supported Employment, and the results motivate the team to continue their efforts.

Outcomes Projected:

Obtaining and maintaining paid employment in the open labour market for persons with disabilities.

Case Study:

1. WMSON staff, in fulfilling the statutory goals related to the vocational activation of persons with disabilities, carry out projects funded by PFRON and/or the EU. Below are examples of those that align with best practices (2022-2023):

- **Project "Career Office III"** co-financed by PFRON funds.

The goal of the project was to support persons with a disability certificate who are of working age and currently unemployed but motivated to find employment.

As part of the project, participants received comprehensive support through psychological counselling and career advice, the development of individualized action plans for their life and career paths, and assistance in implementing these plans through participation in training, activation, digital skills workshops, and employment intermediary services. Participants actively sought employment in the market and built relationships with the business community. The project also included monitoring the professional situation of persons with disabilities and promoting a campaign to encourage the employment of persons with disabilities.

- **Project "Activity Centres"** funded by the Regional Operational Program of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.

This project has been carried out by WMSON since 2015, with three editions completed, and a fourth is currently being planned.

The main goal was to increase individual skills and participation in social and professional life for persons with disabilities through active social rehabilitation. The beneficiaries of the project included people with a disability certificate and individuals at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including unemployed and economically inactive people.

The forms of support provided in the project included individual support from a social activity trainer, lifelong specialist support, psychological assistance, outdoor activities, and group workshops in various fields such as health (meetings with a dietitian, recreational and physical activities), coaching, artistic activities, and integration-educational trips. In the three editions completed, 60 people (three groups of 20) living in Olsztyn participated. In 2021, when 20 people were supported, eight of them found permanent employment, and in 2022, 18 out of 20 participants secured employment.

- **Project "Real Work"** funded by the Operational Program Knowledge Education Development.

The goal of the project was to increase the level and quality of employment for 40 individuals with disabilities who had been unemployed for a long time. The objectives were achieved through individualized and comprehensive vocational activation and improvement of participants' employment situation using the Supported Employment method.

Each participant received support in the form of an individualized action plan that addressed their specific needs to help them enter the labour market. The forms of support available in the project included: career counselling, job placement services, psychological counselling, supported employment, training (vocational and external), professional internships, and other individualized forms of assistance. Each participant engaged in at least two of these forms.

- **Project "Supported Employment"** co-financed by PFRON. This project was implemented in eight editions in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, targeting unemployed individuals with disabilities. It was a cycle of projects aimed at helping participants find and maintain employment using the Supported Employment method. In each edition, the employment rate ranged from 50% to 80%.

The project utilized the Supported Employment method according to the standards of the European Union of Supported Employment. People with disabilities received comprehensive support in their socio-vocational activation process through job coaches, career counsellors, and psychologists.

Support provided to participants included individual work with a coach (also at the workplace during the initial period), psychological support (both individual and group), assessment of practical professional skills, and the opportunity to test themselves

in specific positions through multi-day work trials. Vocational internships (lasting three months) tailored to the participant's needs aimed to secure employment, with job monitoring to help maintain employment, and additional support for participants with disabilities, such as assistants for visually impaired individuals or sign language interpreters. Participants also received reimbursement for transportation costs, and interns were provided with internship stipends.

The intended result was for participants to find and maintain employment, becoming valued employees and full-fledged members of teams, while also having the opportunity to further develop their careers.

4.1.5 The Warmian-Masurian Provincial Headquarters of the Voluntary Labour Corps (Warmińsko-Mazurska Wojewódzka Komenda Ochotniczych Hufców Pracy, OHP)

Participants/ Recipients:	The Warmian-Masurian Provincial Headquarters of the Voluntary Labour Corps; People with special needs
Type of Solution:	The Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP) is a state budget unit supervised by the Minister of Labour. It includes Youth Career Centres, Youth Vocational Information Centres, Youth Employment Offices, Mobile Vocational Information Centres, and Vocational Training Centres.
Objectives:	OHP Job Placement Services for Employers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiating and maintaining cooperation with local employers and entrepreneurs.• Establishing and maintaining contact with employers who have job vacancies, whether for employment, internships, or practical training.• Assisting employers in completing the necessary documentation to

prepare job offers.

- Consulting with employers to determine suitable working conditions for young people, whether for employment, internships, or practical training.
- Assisting employers in selecting candidates for open positions.

Support for OHP participants, graduates, and at-risk youth in job searching:

- Assisting OHP participants, graduates, and youth at risk of social exclusion in the job search process.
- Monitoring the signing of employment contracts for vocational preparation.
- Monitoring the implementation of vocational training or internships for OHP participants.

Implementation:

One of the distinguishing features of OHP employment mediation services, compared to other labour market institutions, is its proactive approach to seeking out employers and initiating collaborations to facilitate the employment of young people or provide opportunities for vocational training, internships, and practical placements. Unlike the traditional approach, OHP employment intermediaries are actively involved in personalized matching of candidates to job or internship offers.

Upon receiving information from employers about job vacancies, the intermediary carefully matches candidates based on verified skills, specific needs, and expectations. This personalized approach ensures that candidates receive job offers that closely align with their skills and career goals.

In addition, OHP organizes job fairs where participants are presented with various employment and internship opportunities. This proactive mediation model is highly valued by young people seeking to enter the job market or gain practical experience, contributing to its

popularity and effectiveness in creating stable job placements and career development opportunities.

The implementation of employment mediation services for OHP graduates and youth aged 15-25, directly managed by OHP, involves several key elements:

1. **Individual consultations and informational meetings:** These sessions include registering individuals in the database and gathering comprehensive information about their skills and qualifications, including any disabilities. This data is crucial for effectively matching them with suitable job offers.
2. **Job matching:** Employment intermediaries analyse and match job offers from employers to the competencies and needs identified in the client database. They assist in preparing application documents and train candidates for job interviews to improve their chances of employment.
3. **Labour market information:** Both group and individual meetings are conducted to provide participants with up-to-date labour market information. This includes detailed insights into available job opportunities and prospects for paid employment.
4. **Participation in job and education fairs:** OHP actively promotes its career development units and educational activities at local and regional job and education fairs. These events aim to prevent youth from being misaligned with the job market by presenting available opportunities and career paths.
5. **Methodological resources and educational support:** OHP collects, develops, and distributes methodological resources, educational publications, and information on professions, schools, and educational pathways. Job offers are shared with interested youth through various communication channels.
6. **Collaboration with career counsellors and educators:** Employment intermediaries work closely with career counsellors, vocational development specialists, and educators to tailor support services to

the specific needs of OHP participants and graduates. This ensures a personalized approach to career development and job placement.

Overall, these comprehensive services aim to strengthen the professional standing of OHP participants and graduates by equipping them with the necessary skills, information, and opportunities to successfully integrate into the workforce and pursue fulfilling careers.

Outcomes Projected:

Vocational activation of disadvantaged individuals aged 18-25 at risk of social exclusion, internships, and practical training for students, including persons with disabilities.

The assistance offered by job centres is aimed at:

- Youth aged 15-17 from educationally underperforming backgrounds:
This group includes individuals who have not completed their mandatory education or schooling. Due to educational challenges, they face difficulties in traditional educational institutions. For these young people, opportunities to gain vocational qualifications are crucial. Job centres focus on providing them with pathways to acquire vocational skills and qualifications that can lead to stable employment.
- Individuals aged 18-25 seeking employment or retraining opportunities:

This category includes a diverse range of people, including those actively seeking employment, recent school graduates, and students looking for practical training opportunities. OHP services are available not only to the unemployed but also to those looking to improve their skills through retraining. The support provided by OHP aims to facilitate access to job offers, vocational training, and career development initiatives tailored to the needs of this age group.

<p>Case Study:</p>	<p>In 2023, OHP facilitated significant achievements in employment mediation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people utilizing employment mediation services: 2,918 (women: 1,413, men: 1,501) • Number of people who found employment: 907 (women: 486, men: 421) • Number of job placements following vocational preparation: 627 <p>What distinguishes OHP in the employment mediation arena is its unique approach to support and the diverse group it serves. These opportunities, often short-term or weekend-based, are personalized according to the profile, skills, personality, and specific needs of each individual. Unlike conventional job offers, OHP opportunities are designed to address specific challenges or skill gaps.</p> <p>OHP job intermediaries possess in-depth knowledge of the local labour market and navigate various companies with a keen understanding of young people's needs. They excel at matching candidates to suitable employers, even when a specific job role is not listed in the database. This proactive approach ensures that employer requirements align with the aspirations of OHP candidates.</p> <p>In addition to professional support, OHP prioritizes the mental well-being of its young participants. The organization seeks out job placements where young people can grow, leveraging their strengths for the benefit of both the employer and employee.</p> <p>In summary, OHP employment mediation services are tailored to individuals aged 15-25, including students, graduates, jobseekers, and the unemployed. OHP enables young people in its units to gain the necessary work experience during their educational journey, recognizing that obtaining one's first job is often a pivotal moment. Preparation is key, as it allows candidates to effectively navigate the labour market and seize opportunities.</p>
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OHP job intermediaries focus on vocational training, supporting skill development through their own workshops and practical tasks completed in external companies. They closely collaborate with employers to provide vocational internships, offering ongoing support and supervision throughout the vocational preparation process. After the training is completed, OHP's commitment extends to securing permanent employment, promoting long-term career development and stability.

Moreover, OHP specialists provide a variety of job offers, from vocational internships to permanent positions, as well as short-term and seasonal opportunities tailored to individual strengths and qualifications. OHP enhances employment prospects through initiatives such as worksite tours, specialized programs like "Youth Success Weeks," "4 Seasons of Vocational Activity," and "Developing My Wings," aimed at empowering young people on their path to success in the labour market.

Another OHP solution providing best practices:

Participants/ Recipients:	The Warmian-Masurian Provincial Headquarters of the Voluntary Labour Corps Non-working, non-educating, and non-training individuals (aged 18-24, belonging to the NEET group—those who are not employed, not in education, and not in vocational training).
Type of Solution:	Youth Guarantee Program — "From Training to Employment — ESF" and "From Training to Employment — YEI".
Objectives:	The goal of the projects was the vocational activation of individuals aged 18-24 who belong to the NEET group.

Implementation:	<p>The project "From Training to Employment – ESF" was implemented in six provinces: Mazowieckie, Opolskie, Podlaskie, Pomorskie, Śląskie, and Wielkopolskie, and was co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).</p> <p>The project "From Training to Employment – YEI" was implemented in the remaining ten provinces: Dolnośląskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Lubelskie, Lubuskie, Łódzkie, Małopolskie, Podkarpackie, Świętokrzyskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, and Zachodniopomorskie. The project was co-financed under the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).</p>
Outcomes Projected:	<p>These projects aimed to facilitate the professional start for individuals aged 18-24 who were in difficult social, family, or personal situations.</p> <p>The initiatives provided comprehensive educational and pedagogical support, focusing on acquiring qualifications, developing skills useful in the labour market, and achieving independence through employment. The support was tailored to each participant's specific situation.</p> <p>Additionally, people with disabilities actively participated in these projects, and their unique challenges in accessing and maintaining employment in the local labour market were addressed through customized support.</p> <p>Participants benefited from gaining, enhancing, or changing their vocational qualifications. They also developed broader competencies and social skills, particularly in interpersonal communication and self-presentation. Practical skills and professional experience were gained through internships, while job search techniques and methods were taught during workshops.</p> <p>Key elements of the projects included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual and group sessions with career counsellors • Active job search workshops

- Vocational courses with financial support and reimbursement for childcare or dependent care costs, complemented by general training such as language courses, computer skills, and driving lessons
- Image creation workshops with stylist services
- Job placements with financial support and reimbursement for childcare or dependent care costs
- Individual employment mediation and vocational internship placement

Participation in the projects was completely free of charge. The projects were implemented in over 140 OHP organizational units across the country, including youth education and employment centres, career development centres, job placement offices, vocational training centres, and other relevant institutions.

Case Study:

In the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, 130 people participated in the project, including 16 individuals with disabilities. All 130 participants took part in group training and workshops led by a psychologist, and 52% of them received additional individual support from a psychologist. All participants benefited from both group and individual sessions with a career counsellor. A total of 126 participants completed vocational courses, and 120 successfully completed professional internships.

Job placement services were provided to 126 young people, resulting in immediate employment for over 40% of the participants after the project concluded. Among those with disabilities, 32% secured employment directly after completing the program.

The project proved effective both in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship and across the country, especially in the areas of vocational training, internships, and job placement. The high level of participation and utilization of the services offered highlights the significant demand and success of these initiatives.

Patrycja's Story

Patrycja, a 21-year-old, faced the challenge of finding a job after finishing high school, considering options such as working abroad. She participated in the "From Training to Employment — YEI" project at the OHP Youth Career Centre in Ełk. The project included various courses, such as English language, computer skills, and driving lessons. With the help of a job intermediary, she selected a company in Ełk, where she completed a three-month internship. Following the internship, she secured a permanent position in the Accounting Department. Patrycja considers the OHP Youth Career Centre and the YEI project to have been crucial in her journey. These EU-supported initiatives, implemented by the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP), provide young people with significant opportunities for professional development.

OHP units in the region play a key role in helping young people gain qualifications, acquire new skills, and connect with reputable employers.

Arek's Story

Arkadiusz from Ełk, after being unable to complete high school, faced uncertainty about his future career path. Encouraged by his peers, he visited the OHP Youth Career Centre, where career counsellors helped him identify his strengths and improve his professional qualifications through vocational courses. At the Career Centre, Arkadiusz learned about the "From Training to Employment" project, which provided him with a range of training and courses. He then completed a three-month internship at Impress Decor, a company specializing in coatings for wood-based materials and modern interior design solutions.

After completing the internship, Arkadiusz was offered a job contract at the company where he interned, and he has been working there for two years. His success story, like many others in Warmia and Mazury, serves as an inspiration for 190 young participants involved in various aspects of the "From Training to Employment" project, co-financed by the European

Union. Thanks to this initiative, participants received support from career counsellors, OHP job intermediaries, psychologists, and took part in active job search workshops and personal branding development.

The "From Training to Employment" project offers opportunities in vocational training, computer skills, language courses, and category B driving licence training. It also includes professional internships, often leading directly to job contracts for young participants. Independence, self-sufficiency, and employment are the paths that OHP creates for participants in EU-funded projects.

4.1.6 The Office for People with Disabilities at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (*Biuro ds. Osób Niepełnosprawnych na Uniwersytecie Warmińsko-Mazurskim w Olsztynie*)

Participants/ Recipients:	The Office for People with Disabilities at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (BON) Students with disabilities
Type of Solution:	The office coordinates activities undertaken at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn to support students and PhD candidates with disabilities, ensuring they are able to complete their studies.
Objectives:	Elimination of architectural/institutional, communication, and educational barriers.
Implementation:	Services offered by the Office for Students with Disabilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal assistant for students with disabilities• Support services for individuals on the autism spectrum• Psychological assistance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign language interpreter services • Assistance from a stenographer • Career counselling • Transportation assistance • Access to the ABC Library collections • Dedicated lectures tailored to specific needs • Dedicated physical education (P.E.) sessions • Polish language classes adapted to the needs of students with disabilities • Access to a computer lab with necessary accommodations • Rental of specialized equipment • Access to the university library tailored to the needs of students with disabilities
Outcomes Projected:	Assisting a person with a disability in completing their education and preparing to enter the job market.
Case Study:	<p>The Office for Students with Disabilities at the University is actively involved in providing comprehensive support to students with diverse needs, ensuring they have equal access to education and opportunities for success. Here are some key activities and accommodations provided:</p> <p>Support for a blind fourth-year student in the Faculty of Humanities:</p> <p>Adapted educational materials:</p> <p>The university provides teaching materials in formats tailored to students' needs, including Braille and electronic formats compatible with assistive software.</p>

Orientation and mobility course:

The student participates in a course aimed at improving navigation skills in the academic environment and daily life, supporting independence and self-reliance.

Touch typing course:

The university offers a touch typing course, equipping the student with skills to efficiently use a computer for note-taking and academic assignments.

Integration events:

The student has the opportunity to engage in social activities, such as kayaking trips and meetups, facilitating peer relationships and social integration.

Access to the ABC digital library:

Through a partnership with the ABC digital library, the student gains access to digital materials formatted for assistive software, making reading more accessible.

Student assistant support:

A student assistant helps with daily academic tasks, including attending classes, taking notes, and communicating with professors.

Dedicated tutorials:

The university organizes dedicated tutorials for the student, providing extra academic support, help with understanding course material, and skill development.

Psychological support:

The student receives psychological support to cope with emotional and psychological challenges related to their disability and academic life.

These initiatives formed the foundation of support for a blind student in the Faculty of Humanities, which was crucial to her academic success and achieving her educational goals. They enabled her to continue her studies in her chosen field and work towards her professional objectives.

Support for a fifth-year student on the autism spectrum:

- The student receives support and assistance from a coordinator or specialist for students with disabilities, who helps organize academic life, facilitates communication with lecturers, and addresses challenges related to studying.
- The student participates in a mentoring program, receiving guidance from senior students or university staff to adjust to university life and handle academic challenges.
- Participation in a support group for individuals on the autism spectrum: The student can join a group dedicated to people with autism or other conditions, promoting experience sharing, emotional support, and the development of new social skills.
- Integration and social skills development: Participation in group events organized by the Office for Students with Disabilities (BON), aimed at integrating students and fostering social skills through various activities and workshops.

The student is expected to complete their chosen field of study in 2024. For the defense of their thesis, the university introduced special accommodations, including the presence of an observer during the exam. This adjustment is designed to help the student manage stressful situations and better understand the exam requirements.

Another initiative aimed at supporting students with disabilities at the University of Warmia and Mazury (UWM) focuses on eliminating architectural barriers within university facilities. These improvements include:

- Installation of an lift for persons with disabilities in the Faculty of Technical Sciences and implementation of aluminum ramps.
- Installation of stair climbers at UWM.
- Adaptation of the Faculty of Humanities at UWM to meet the needs of blind and visually impaired individuals.
- Equipping the Language Studies Centre with equipment tailored to the needs of students with disabilities.
- Expansion of the University Library with specialized equipment for persons with disabilities.
- Adapting the Physical Education and Sports Centre to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- Installation of induction loops in lecture halls to support persons with hearing impairments.

The Office for Students with Disabilities offers assistant services, many of which are provided by graduates with disabilities or through jobs and internships for students with disabilities. Some services are also provided by students for fellow students (e.g., stenographers are mostly students who help others understand course material). Support groups and psychological help (via the Empathy program) are also available.

For students interested in learning sign language, free classes at various levels are offered to enhance communication with Deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

The University Student Council, in collaboration with the Office for Students with Disabilities, annually organizes a charitable fundraiser called "Kortowski Mikołaj," focusing on providing material assistance for purchasing essential equipment for persons with disabilities (such as wheelchairs, prosthetics, and other aids

to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities).

Additionally, the Office for Students with Disabilities works closely with the Career Office. This partnership supports graduates with disabilities who are ready to enter the labour market and engage in social activities. The Career Office provides career counselling, training, and is responsible for distributing job opportunities for students and graduates, including those with disabilities.

4.1.7 The Career Advisor at the Economic and Trade School Complex No. 2 in Olsztyn (Zespół Szkół Ekonomiczno-Handlowych Nr 2 w Olsztynie)

Institution:	The Career Advisor at the Economic and Trade School Complex No. 2 in Olsztyn; High school/vocational school students/graduates
Type of Solution:	Career counselling using the Job Coaching method
Objectives:	The goal is to promote Job Coaching as a modern and effective method for working with individuals facing a career crisis. Job Coaching prioritizes self-awareness, helping individuals discover their values, goals, talents, and professional predispositions. Only in the final stages are career counselling elements, such as standardized tests, introduced.
Implementation:	Job coaching is a process focused on change, aimed at improving the client's professional effectiveness and uncovering and developing their potential. In this process, the coach accompanies the client in achieving the goals they have set for themselves, asking the right questions, suggesting

where to explore further or where to pause, but not providing ready-made solutions—the client reaches those on their own. This approach gives the client greater self-awareness and teaches independence. The areas addressed in the coaching process involve the client's values, beliefs (both supportive and limiting), resources, strengths, and motivation for action. Individual and group sessions, such as during lessons, focus on the future and solutions rather than the past and problems. **In the final phase, coaching integrates with career counselling, covering aspects such as:**

- Defining personal values and professional direction
- Discovering strengths and talents
- Identifying professional predispositions
- Analysing the current career path
- Developing a modern CV
- Learning various job search methods
- Preparing for job interviews
- Creating a personalized business model

Outcomes Projected:

- Increase in awareness when choosing a career path
- Boost in self-esteem
- Preparation for the recruitment stage with the chosen employer
- Development of self-awareness regarding personal and professional skills
- Building a positive attitude towards work;

Case Study:

Julia is 19 years old and lives in Olsztyn. After completing high school with a biology-chemistry focus, she couldn't decide which field of study to pursue, though she was most drawn to medical studies (a choice encouraged by her family, who saw her as an excellent future doctor).

Having previously consulted with a career counsellor, she learned through J. Holland's test results that she has the potential for a medical career.

According to the test, her three dominant career predispositions are the Social (S), Investigative (I), and Conventional (C) types. This indicates that Julia has a natural inclination for working with people, enjoys learning and diving deep into topics that interest her, and prefers fixed rules and structured work environments.

Although the test clearly suggested that the career Julia was considering was suitable for her, she remained uncertain about her decision and signed up for an individual Job Coaching session.

The first session involved working with coaching cards displaying various pictures and images. When asked to envision her dream job, Julia mostly chose images of people in need and group settings. She did not select cards showing individuals working or performing tasks alone.

The following sessions were based on deepening questions using a coaching tool known as "**Dilts' Pyramid**." According to this tool, the coach asks questions in a specific order:

1. Environment — This layer relates to the work context: *Where? With whom? Under what circumstances?*
2. Behaviour — How the client wants to behave in certain situations: *What am I doing? How do I do it?*
3. Skills — The third layer helps the client become aware of the skills they want to have and what they already possess: *What do I already know? What do I want to learn? Which skills are valuable to me?*
4. Values — In this layer, the client reflects on what is most important in life, and what drives their decisions: *What is important to me in life?*
5. Identity — The next level answers the question: *Who am I? What defines my identity?* This is often a difficult question, and many people have never asked it before.

6. Mission — The top of Dilts' Pyramid: *What is the higher purpose? Why do I want to do this? What do I want to contribute to the world?*

After four sessions, Julia discovered that she is a very social and empathetic person. The environment she envisions working in is not a doctor's office, as she would feel too isolated and cut off from people there. Additionally, she wants to engage in longer, deeper conversations with patients, build relationships, and provide daily, tangible support to those in difficult health situations.

When asked about skills, she expressed that she would like to physically relieve someone's suffering, to help through action rather than just diagnosis. For Julia, people are the most important—having close contact with them, building relationships, and offering help to those in need. At this stage, the job coach introduced exercises to highlight Julia's talents and strengths, helping her discover her resources and understand how she can already start drawing on them.

Next, Julia identified herself as part of a larger whole, seeing herself as an element alongside others, not separate from them. The mission of her work, as she envisioned it, would be to help others and accompany people through their suffering.

After completing the coaching sessions and listening to the job coach's summary of her reflections, Julia decided that she no longer wanted to study medicine, but rather pursue nursing. She didn't want to be an authority figure that patients see for only a few minutes during rounds in the hospital. Instead, she wanted to be a companion, someone who is there for patients. The next stage of the Job Coaching process was to establish the criteria for Julia's choice of university studies (e.g., proximity to home, the university's reputation, size, and course offerings, including opportunities for international internships). The final phase was pure career counselling—presenting different university options, providing information about the application process, and guiding Julia toward her final choice of nursing as her field of study.

The use of the "Dilts' Pyramid" method in working with people in difficult life situations or with disabilities can bring many benefits. It helps individuals better understand themselves, their needs, goals, and possibilities. Here's how this method can be applied:

Environment – Understanding the Context of Life

- **Environmental analysis:** For individuals in challenging situations or with disabilities, it is essential to understand their current environment: Where do they live? Who do they interact with? What support do they have? This step helps assess which aspects of the environment support their development and which may need changes or additional support.
- **Adapting the space:** Identifying what changes in their living or working environment could improve comfort and well-being, such as better accessibility, helpful technologies, or social support.

Behaviour – Shaping Behaviours and Habits

- **Developing positive habits:** This method focuses on how individuals can cultivate behaviours that support their daily functioning and help them cope with challenges.
- **Coping strategies:** It teaches how to respond in difficult situations, reduce stress, and maximize effective action.

Skills – Strengthening Competencies

- **Recognizing strengths:** It helps to identify and strengthen existing skills, which can increase self-esteem and effectiveness.
- **Developing new skills:** It allows defining which new skills may be useful, whether in the context of work, independence, or social integration.

Values — Establishing Life Direction

- **Understanding what truly matters:** It helps identify key values that guide their lives. This enables them to make decisions aligned with what is most important to them, which can increase their sense of purpose and satisfaction.
- **Motivation for action:** Understanding their values can be a powerful motivator for making difficult decisions and striving to improve their situation.

Identity — Discovering and Building Self-Identity

- **Strengthening the sense of identity:** It helps individuals with disabilities build a stronger sense of identity, independent of their limitations. They can discover who they are beyond their life situation or physical restrictions.
- **Positive self-perception:** Working on identity can help develop a positive self-image, crucial when facing challenges.

Mission — Discovering Meaning and Purpose

- **Defining a higher purpose:** It helps people in difficult situations discover their personal mission and the meaning of life. This can be particularly significant when they face limitations and difficulties.
- **Finding purpose in helping others:** For many people with disabilities or in challenging situations, realizing that they can impact others' lives, even in small ways, can be a source of immense satisfaction and strength.

Practical Application:

In working with individuals in difficult situations or with disabilities, the "Dilts Pyramid" method is used in coaching sessions, career counselling, therapy, or support programs. By guiding them through the various levels of the pyramid, it helps them fully understand themselves,

discover their strengths, build confidence, and set goals that align with their values and abilities.

A key aspect is the personalized approach, adapting methods to the specific needs of the individual, and ensuring the inclusion of support that will help them achieve their defined goals.

4.2 Best Practices in Job Placement for People with Disabilities and Those in Difficult Situations — Italy

4.2.1 Ciss Verbano — Social Consortium for Social Care and Job Inclusion Services (Verbania Province, Piedmont region)

Participants/ Recipients:	The Intermunicipal Consortium of Social Services (CISS — Consorzio intercomunale dei servizi sociali) offers the SIL (Servizio di Integrazione Lavorativa) service, which focuses on the vocational integration of individuals with intellectual or physical disabilities, as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
Type of Solution:	Social services are managed by the consortium of municipalities in the province of Verbano Cusio Ossola. The consortium of social services provides targeted employment mediation services for individuals with disabilities or those in disadvantaged situations.
Objectives:	The employment mediation service of the Intermunicipal Social Services Consortium (<i>Ciss Verbano</i>) aims to promote the social and professional integration of individuals with disabilities, as well as adults in personal crisis facing socio-economic difficulties. Through educational initiatives, tailored projects are created to meet individual needs, with the goal of supporting the target individuals in entering the workforce.

Implementation:	<p>SIL (Job Integration Service) is a territorial service that provides educational and social support to individuals with specific needs related to job integration. The overall goal of the service is to help individuals with social difficulties or disabilities adapt to various professions and achieve social integration.</p> <p>The consortium offers the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market-oriented approach: Counselling services on emerging trends aimed at assisting individuals with disabilities in making effective choices regarding retraining and enhancing their skills necessary for employment, through both formal and non-formal education; • Empirical educational activities: These activities aim to strengthen and maintain the skills and competencies useful for employment and social inclusion of vulnerable target groups; • Work opportunities: These help individuals with disabilities regain professional and social skills through hands-on experience in real, productive work environments. Each job position is designed to accommodate the specific needs and limitations resulting from various types of disabilities, with an appropriate level of responsibility; • Collaboration and networking with businesses and other local entities: This fosters integration by linking individuals with employment opportunities. <p>The procedure is personalized and follows a specific process: case managers fill out a service protocol.</p> <p>Targeted employment mediation services from the local public employment office then receive the documentation and assess whether the individual's case aligns with available job offers, according to the specific requirements of the profile for persons with disabilities or in disadvantaged situations. The entire procedure must go through official</p>
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support channels and institutions: the consortium is the first step, as a personal report on each person with a disability/disadvantaged status must be completed by social workers from the region or municipality, who are authorized to create such documents.

The specific role of the Inter-municipal Consortium of Social Services (*Ciss Verbano*) is to assist other vocational integration services in identifying the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. The goal is to find a job position that is individually tailored to the person's needs.

The process managed by *Ciss Verbano* consists of the following stages:

- **Interview**

An interview with the person with a disability, usually accompanied by a family member, conducted by two social workers from the consortium. This ensures that individuals with disabilities enrolled in the vocational integration program have two contact points. The interview focuses on the person's interests, skills, and expectations regarding employment mediation (questions in the interview cover the individual's personal profile, education, and previous work experience).

- **Customized job placement or skills enhancement program**

Ciss Verbano aims to create a personalized employment mediation or skills enhancement program that fits the individual's needs and vocational mediation goals, while also considering the job offers that are actually available in the local context. The objective is not to immediately secure employment, but to initiate a vocational integration program that can eventually lead the individual with a disability to find long-term or medium-term accommodation and employment opportunities.

Persons with disabilities who start this vocational integration program are usually 18–20 years old, recent high school or vocational school graduates who need to find a job after completing their education.

Most of them have cognitive disabilities, and the inter-municipal consortium of social services provides them with support in finding

employment. The consortium also ensures long-term job stability by offering ongoing monitoring and crisis management services throughout the professional life of the Persons with disabilities or individual in a difficult situation.

In fact, persons with disabilities or those in disadvantaged situations require continuous consultations and support, as they have special mentoring needs. The inter-municipal consortium of social services offers training to help Persons with disabilities or disadvantaged individuals stay in their workplace and maintain healthy relationships with others.

The social consortium works with a wide network of companies offering inclusive employment opportunities, with a particular focus on production workshops, certain supermarkets, school canteens, and kindergartens – places where employees with disabilities can be independent and thrive professionally.

Within this network of companies, each worker with a disability is assigned a mentor who maintains individual contact with them and provides full support for the employee's social needs.

Outcomes Projected:

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation became more complicated than before. The employment rate of workers with disabilities holding full-time permanent contracts (according to Sole24ore's research) dropped below 30% nationwide.

In a year, *Ciss Verbano* in the VCO province manages to secure only two full-time contracts, with most agreements being for short-term internships.

Case Study:

We present case studies involving young individuals with Down syndrome: a man and a woman.

The man with disabilities completed an internship at McDonald's under an employment contract. He started with a few hours of work per week, and then the hours were gradually increased to 36 per week. The intern was productive and eager to work, so the host company decided to hire him under a full-time employment contract, appreciating the job placement opportunity due to the opening of a new McDonald's location in the area.

The woman with disabilities worked for H&M, the Italian clothing company, under an internship agreement. She initially had difficulties interacting with customers in the store. She received support to improve key soft skills necessary for building customer relationships, such as communication skills, empathy, patience, and flexibility. Thanks to mentoring and skill enhancement services, the company was satisfied with her work and soon offered her a full-time position.

Another man with an intellectual disability, aged 22, was employed as a caretaker at a camper rental company. Before completing his six-month internship, the social services team from the inter-municipal consortium supported the company in offering him a long-term employment contract.

These case studies demonstrate that the inter-municipal consortium of social services places significant importance on understanding each person's history and personal profile. Only through a deep understanding of the individual with disabilities is it possible to take a broader view of their potential and design a personalized and effective vocational integration program.

4.2.2 We4Job — The Network of Job Placement Points in Vocational Schools (Omar Vocational Institute and Aurive Social Cooperative with a network of VET schools in the Piedmont)

Participants/ Recipients:	<p>We4Job — The network of job placement points in vocational schools</p>
Type of Solution:	<p>Job placement points in vocational education and training (VET) institutions are becoming increasingly important to bridge the gap between schools and the labour market, especially for young people at risk of unemployment and social exclusion. These offices support and promote internships (including vocational internships and apprenticeships) both in Italy and abroad, thus enhancing employment opportunities and career prospects for young individuals.</p>
Objectives:	<p>The WE4JOB project aims to increase the innovation and quality of job placement services in vocational schools, to facilitate the transition from education to professional work. Students with special educational needs are at risk of marginalization, and their chances of success are often limited by a system that does not take their specific requirements into account.</p> <p>The WE4JOB VET school network focuses particularly on optimizing the benefits offered by job placement services in terms of integration, re-engagement, and upskilling/reskilling processes. This initiative addresses the current European and global crisis, which disproportionately affects disadvantaged youth, and seeks to counter it by developing resources that enable active participation within the socio-economic framework.</p>

Implementation:	<p>The good practice is based on the following key elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a database to "map" students with disabilities in VET schools involves creating a comprehensive database to identify and include students with disabilities in free job placement services, thus supporting their chances of employment after graduation. • Seeking opportunities for finding suitable professional integration provided by businesses and companies that align with the specific needs of students with disabilities. • Enhanced initial training and continuous professional skill development, improving both initial training and ongoing skill development for students with disabilities. This includes integrating formal, non-formal, and work-based learning opportunities to ensure that students acquire the necessary skills for employment. • Active stakeholder engagement involving young persons with disabilities, their parents, and teachers in updating objectives related to skill development and vocational integration.
Outcomes Projected:	<p>An increase in the number of job opportunities for VET graduates with disabilities, ensuring their successful transition into the labour market.</p>
Case study:	<p>A graduate with a diploma from a VET school, coming from an immigrant background and with a certified physical disability, making him a member of a protected category according to Law 104 of 2 May 1992.</p> <p>As a recent graduate of the <i>Pininfarina VET School</i>, one of the schools in the <i>We4Job</i> network, he benefited from the following employment services provided by the staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial intake, including signing a service provision agreement; • Information on the regional support network for job search and vocational training services;

- Help-desk with computers and access to specific employment services programs, as well as platforms to browse and select job and training opportunities;
- Update of the user's professional profile in the regional SILP system;
- Support in completing the Declaration of Immediate Availability (DID) to officially confirm "job-seeking status";
- Assessment of training and professional needs, skills review, promotion of internships and tutoring opportunities;
- Collaboration with other schools in the *We4Job* network, licensed to provide employment services;
- Assistance with writing cover letters and CVs, interview preparation, and mock interviews;
- Development of an Individual Action Plan (PAI) for job integration;
- Support during the recognition, pre-selection, and direction-setting stages;
- Assistance and monitoring of the job placement process in the workplace.

As a result of the *We4Job* initiative, the graduate secured an internship with FASI ENGINEERING SRL.

4.2.3 Social Cooperative *Differenza* for the Professional Integration of Persons with Disabilities

Participants/ Recipients:	Social Cooperative <i>Differenza</i> for the professional integration of persons with disabilities.
Type of Solution:	<p>Internships, individualized counselling, and advisory services aimed at students with disabilities from vocational schools.</p> <p>This is a model of inclusive vocational education for young students with disabilities. The solution is designed to support the transition from school to the job market.</p>
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removal of obstacles encountered by students with disabilities in completing mandatory internships in vocational and high schools.• Improvement of methods and tools available to provide certain informational support services for students with disabilities and their parents, with a particular focus on delivering detailed information about the procedure required to obtain a disability certification.• Facilitation of the transition from VET school to employment for students with disabilities who have recently graduated from VET or high school, due to numerous barriers to professional integration related to their disabilities.
Implementation:	<p>The implemented actions were directed towards three target groups within VET:</p> <p>1) students with disabilities;</p> <p>2) the parents of these students;</p> <p>3) VET teachers and other stakeholders involved in professional integration.</p>

The services provided can be described as follows:

Services aimed to VET teachers and other stakeholders involved in professional integration

Multilateral Roundtable to Support Enhanced Collaboration

This initiative supported stronger cooperation between vocational and high school teachers, public and private employment services, and social services dedicated to the social and professional integration of young high school students or recent graduates with disabilities.

Networking Activities with Key Local Stakeholders

Meetings and networking activities were held with staff from the Provincial Public Employment Office of VCO (including the director and key employees) as well as representatives from the Regional Education Office in the Province of VCO.

Training on Supporting Students with Disabilities

Online training was conducted for high school teachers, co-managed with staff from the public employment office of VCO Province. This training seminar targeted teachers responsible for various aspects of student disability management.

Course Structure: The course consisted of four hours of lessons, organized into two online sessions, each lasting two hours. The training aimed to provide VET teachers with detailed information on how to support students with disabilities and their parents in obtaining an official disability certification. This included information about the requirements for disability status, and guidance on the bureaucratic process of formally obtaining certification for a person with a disability. This certification is required to access specialized employment services offered by public employment offices for individuals with disabilities.

The promotion of the training offer aimed at VET teachers was carried out through the preparation of a circular letter (official presentation letter) specifically addressed to school directors, support teachers, and post-graduate orientation staff.

The project presentation was sent to all high schools in the VCO province, facilitated by a cooperation agreement with the Provincial Education Office of the VCO province.

Services targeted at students with disabilities, their parents, and teachers included the following:

1) Preparation and distribution of informational materials on key issues concerning the integration of persons with disabilities

These materials were specifically developed to better inform students, their parents, and teachers about the benefits of obtaining disability status, particularly in terms of improving prospects for professional integration. The informational materials also provided details about the range of professional integration services available at the local level, with a focus on the targeted employment services offered by the VCO province's public employment office.

2) Information and counselling points in schools

Information points were set up to showcase the services available to students with disabilities, both through the school-based employment services and the local network of public and private social and employment services.

These information points were established in all participating high schools. The information and counselling services offered a broad range of individualized counselling and professional integration services for interested students and their parents. The focus was on providing detailed information about available course offerings that support the professional integration of students with disabilities after graduation.

Services aimed at students with disabilities

- 1) Counselling and scouting services toward the post diploma job placement of the disabled newly graduated students from high schools

Scouting of the disabled new-graduates interested in benefiting from job placement services offered by private and public services, with special regard to the public targeted job placement services offered by the Public job centre of the Verbania Province. Scouting of the business companies offering some job placement opportunities which are suitable for the work inclusion of the newly-graduated disabled students.

All the collected data about the disabled students and companies were valued for the creation of a data bank supporting the matching between inclusive job offers and disabled jobseekers. The database creation included some profiling actions for the detailed description of the business companies offering the inclusive job offers, together with the detailed description of the personal and professional profiles of the disabled students included in the job placement services.

The action resulted in a number of 10 disabled students from Vet and a number of 5 companies inserted in the Facility Job database for inclusive job placement services.

The data available in the facility job database were collected thanks to some Individual interviews directed to further detail the description of the personal profiles of the disabled students (profiling). The personal profiles of the disabled persons were clearly described in terms of studies, background, work experiences, non-formal abilities, as well as personal social-work integration goals, toward the definition of some customised job inclusion projects.

2) Support to disabled students in the access to extracurricular training opportunities based on non-formal education methods (intercultural youth exchanges, internships, or active-citizenships projects) aimed at the enhancement of transversal skills useful for the enhanced employability.

In the frame of the action 4 young disabled students were involved in Erasmus + intercultural youth exchange experiences in connection with the local Eurodesk office of the Vco Province, and Vedogiovane social cooperative. The non-formal training programs offered were effective in terms of impact on the empowerment of the transversal skills useful to find a job placement.

Moreover, 2 young disabled students were supported to join the call for the Universal Civil Service volunteering program (long term volunteering program effective for the soft skills empowerment toward enhanced employability).

3) Inclusive school internship programs

The school internship program was organised to involve young disabled students or the students with some special needs (learning difficulties) in informative-participative activities on subjects connected to the empowerment of competences useful to find a job.

Staff: case manager, volunteer in national civic service with a peer education role.

Duration: 30 hours of school-internship program for disabled students, with online modules integrated with in presence activities.

Case management meetings: 10 individual counselling meetings lasting 2 hours each + 1 hour of auto-consulting contents.

Format: Flexible format (dates, hours, presence and online modules flexible according to the school's request).

Target: the program was addressed to students of the 3rd, 4th and 5th year of high schools.

Description of the inclusive school internship program:

The inclusive school internship program included a wide set of non-formal education activities, which were mainly organised in presence inside the partner high schools, and managed by the Facility job staff, together with the teachers.

The inclusive School-internship program structure included a set of activities held in presence integrated with some smart working support-online activities, together with the offer of a set of self consultation material at disposal for self learning (combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities). The total amount of school internship activities-hours organised in each involved institute was a total number of 30 hours (20 hours of lessons divided in 10 modules of 2 hours each, 10 self-managed activities assisted with the delivery of self-consultation material). At the conclusion of the school internship, the involved disabled or disadvantaged students received a certificate of participation. In particular, the modules in which the inclusive school internship was composed were the followings:

- Presentation of the Facility Job project with the social-work inclusion of the young disabled (Introduction of the Pcto course, mutual knowledge, expectations)
- The personal profiling of the participants: assisted profiling activities of counselling and coaching toward disability management
- The definition of customised projects of work insertion (assisted activities + individual compilation of a customised project)
- Scouting of the available opportunities for the skills empowerment of the transversal abilities useful in employability (in connection with the territorial services and support projects for employability, active citizenship, cross-border mobility for the young people

- Assisted CV compilation (Job placement services jointly managed with the Aurive social cooperative)
- Work search simulation: (assisted internet navigation through the main job search portals and professionalising opportunities
- Games based work and simulation on the active use of the social media and the job search portals – (Differenza)
- Job interview simulation (Aurive staff)
- Case histories: encounter with significative testimonials
- Counselling activities and customised assistance (Aurive/Differenza)
- Post-graduation orientation
- Sociality support

Outcomes Projected:

- To enhance competences useful for the employability of disabled students and supporting the enhanced accessibility to the disabled target of skills empowerment and job placement programs (school internships, professionalising laboratories and post-graduation orientation activities).
- To enhance the job placement perspectives for the disabled students who are newly graduated from high school.
- To increase the awareness of the disabled students, their parents, and their teachers about the offer of private and public work inclusion services.

Case Study:

Anna, a third-year high school student with disabilities (speech, hearing, and vision impairments), and student B., who has a physical disability.

Anna uses a communicator, a tablet equipped with software to assist with her speech and hearing difficulties. During individual interviews conducted as part of the project with students with disabilities and their parents, Anna's mother expressed an interest in having her daughter

participate in social inclusion initiatives during the summer. These initiatives would help Anna develop relational and communication skills that would be beneficial for both social and professional integration.

A similar request was made by the mother of Student B, a high school student with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair, which significantly limits his independence in daily activities. His lack of independence posed a barrier to his prospects for professional inclusion.

It became apparent that his challenges stemmed not only from his physical disability but also from a lack of self-confidence and difficulty coping in new situations outside his comfort zone, which was provided by his school and family environment. This insecurity significantly limited his willingness to participate in extracurricular activities that could enhance his skills and improve his chances of employment.

B. felt confident only in his home environment, but the small town he lived in did not offer real employment opportunities suited to his skills and level of autonomy.

During the vocational counselling program, one of the primary individual goals was to increase the participant's ability to function independently, with a view toward the possibility of relocating to a nearby city, which could offer more job opportunities adapted for persons with disabilities.

4.2.4 *Abile Job* — a Private Company Specializing in Inclusive Job Placement

Participants/ Recipients:	<p><i>Abile Job</i> is a targeted placement agency working for the work inclusion of the disabled target</p>
Type of Solution:	<p><i>Abile Job</i> is an employment agency operating nationwide since 2016. Their services include training programs for companies aimed at facilitating the integration of disadvantaged individuals, particularly persons with disabilities. These programs are designed to increase the awareness and knowledge of a company's human resources about the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.</p> <p><i>Abile Job</i> has developed several modules addressing different types of disabilities. Their strategies include both direct collaboration with companies and businesses (assisting in the recruitment process, sharing best practices on integration, and providing data on the personal and professional profiles of job-seeking individuals with disabilities) and creating corporate inclusion projects.</p> <p>Direct collaboration with companies</p> <p><i>Abile Job</i> focuses on working closely with employers, responding to their need for support in hiring persons with disabilities. They provide information and data on the positive outcomes of employing persons with disabilities, helping companies understand that professional inclusion plays an important role in improving the overall well-being of all employees. The hiring company is appropriately informed about how to engage employees with disabilities.</p> <p><i>Abile Job</i> offers assistance in recruitment procedures by managing the matching process, analysing candidates' professional profiles concerning available job positions. A key aspect that sets <i>Abile Job</i>'s approach apart is the active involvement of the family of individuals with disabilities in the</p>

employment mediation process, often with the support and mediation of local disability associations. The overall goal is to integrate families of persons with disabilities seeking employment, job mediators, employment services, and individuals with disabilities to foster better collaboration towards securing employment for the disabled (including a joint analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to inclusive job mediation, considering the profile of the individual with disabilities).

Social Projects

As previously mentioned, *Abile Job* is responsible for developing and promoting several social projects. The "FormidAble Project," launched in collaboration with the social enterprise "(Ri)generiamo," focuses on employing persons with disabilities in Italian Leroy Merlin stores, in partnership with the association "Bricolage del cuore".

Abile Job has expanded the project to include individuals with physical disabilities, those on the autism spectrum, and persons with intellectual disabilities.

Currently, all 52 Leroy Merlin stores in Italy are involved in the project. A total of 120 persons with disabilities have been employed through this initiative, working in the stores, green spaces, and the Makers Caffè within the Italian Leroy Merlin locations.

The FormidAble Project operates as follows:

- Creation of a disability profile;
- Comprehensive and general training for company employees to prepare them to adapt to the needs of persons with disabilities;
- An initial meeting between the project manager, the store manager, and the HR manager.

The project had an incredibly positive impact, setting off a virtuous dynamic that benefited the company as a whole (investing one euro for inclusion gives a return of €3.2, and there is a specific social report on this <https://ri-generiamo.it/identita/il-nostro-bilancio-4/>).

Objectives:

- Offering services tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities in the area of professional integration.
- Improving the quality of vocational integration services by providing highly personalized assistance in analysing the ideal match between job offers and the personal/professional profile of persons with disabilities seeking employment.
- Taking care of various aspects related to workplace accessibility in companies — not only by removing physical barriers in the work environment, but also by addressing relational and cultural challenges that may hinder the inclusion of an employee with a disability into the company team.

Implementation:

Improving the quality of methods used in recruitment processes to create an inclusive and equitable work environment. The goals for improving the quality of employment services for persons with disabilities can be summarized as follows:

- More inclusive and targeted job requirements;
- Expanding partnerships with local social organizations that offer employment mediation opportunities;
- Increasing the role of employees in supporting the professional integration of Persons with disabilities.

Outcomes Projected:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing effective and replicable vocational integration projects that are sustainable from the long-term perspective of the company. • Enabling companies to independently manage any emerging issues related to vocational integration. Comprehensive training of all company personnel in disability management. • Supporting the creation of a network connecting companies, disability associations, employment centres, and families working together to ensure the long-term sustainability of vocational integration programs.
Case Study:	<p>An example of significant collaboration between <i>Abile Job</i> and a company is the following situation:</p> <p>In preparation for hiring a person with disabilities at an industrial plant in Apulia, the company organized a special training course for all 30 employees on topics related to accessibility and inclusion. This example shows that companies are becoming increasingly aware of the need to work on making corporate culture more inclusive, not only with respect to the well-being and integration needs of employees with disabilities, but also regarding the personal and professional needs of every employee.</p> <p>Another example presented by <i>Abile Job</i> is the "PerMicro" project. PerMicro is a large microcredit association based in Italy, operating nationwide. It was established in 2007 in Turin, with the support of Otreventura and Fondazione Paideia (two founding partners). The aim of PerMicro is to create jobs and promote integration through professional credit and microcredit, as well as through financial education. It also offers vocational training and corporate assistance services. Since its inception, PerMicro has granted 21,042 loans worth over 152 million euros, supporting many families in transitional difficulties and fostering the birth and development of numerous entrepreneurial activities across various fields.</p>

In accordance with current regulations regarding the employment of persons with disabilities, PerMicro decided to collaborate with *Abile Job*.

A screening process was conducted to select suitable individuals according to the company's needs, and ten candidates were recommended for interviews. One person was selected and began working at PerMicro. Following this positive example, the same process is set to be repeated in other Italian branches of PerMicro to employ persons with disabilities.

4.2.5 The Exar Social Cooperative — Private Company Specializing in Inclusive Job Placement

Participants/
Recipients: *EXAR Social Value Solutions* is an employment and training agency specializing in active employment policies and human resource management.

Type of Solution: **The Exar Social Cooperative has particular experience in working with persons with disabilities.** Exar develops social innovation projects, collaborating with public services, non-governmental organizations, and businesses to support disadvantaged individuals in gaining employment opportunities.

Objectives: The objectives are as follows:

- Facilitating the engagement and participation of disadvantaged jobseekers in alternative career paths outside formal education and training;
- Focusing on social interventions aimed at helping disadvantaged individuals who have fewer employment opportunities;
- Supporting disadvantaged youth even after they have secured employment, to ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

Implementation:

The implementation is linked to several successful social innovation projects focused on employment mediation for disadvantaged individuals. One example is the following project:

Articolo+1

The project supports the launch of short training courses and internships (lasting from two to four months), reflecting common requests expressed by companies within the labour market and aimed at providing disadvantaged persons with opportunities for immediate job integration. Thanks to the extensive partner network with companies offering job placement positions and with social services focused on job inclusion issues, the project supplies an extremely flexible range of customizable services to involve young persons in work based learning programs held individually or as a group. Additionally, the project also includes some work orientation and guidance services.

Another key element of the programme is the introduction of a "premium payment" mechanism based on the placement results of the involved job placement agencies. The premium payment mechanism is connected and proportional to the employability level of the beneficiary (the lower the employability entails, the higher is the payment rate). Thanks to the premium payment mechanism, the Art+1 programme contributes to support the employer who offers a paid internship or a job position by covering part of the monthly allowance.

Projekt Vulcano

The Vulcano Project, stemming from the "Zunami Project," was made possible with the support of the European Union. It is conducted in the Piedmont region in collaboration with Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro and the company Exar.

The project is funded by the European Commission through the programme “Progress”; the internships, granted by Agenzia Piemonte Lavoro, are funded by the Piedmont Region through the Disabled Regional Fund.

The project aligns with regional pilot actions aimed at developing new models of employment mediation services for persons with disabilities.

The Vulcano Project aims to provide employment mediation support services to every individual on the public employment service's target list. According to Law 68/99, each person on this list must receive assistance from a job coach during the initial orientation and counselling phase, followed by an internship at a company in the region.

Throughout the project, employment centres regularly collaborated with professionals from Exar and Infocoop, who were integrated into the public centres' staff, assisting public employees in managing counselling and job mediation services. The Vulcano Project utilized the IPS (Individual Placement and Support) method as a model for supported vocational integration services for individuals with mental illnesses. This method provides short-term, individualized support services for selected individuals with disabilities to help them find employment.

Exar supported public employment offices in increasing the number of persons with disabilities employed through this service, thereby assisting companies in complying with Law 68/99. Exar worked with public employment offices in the Piedmont region to monitor and analyse the methods used, as well as to evaluate the professional impact of internships conducted using the IPS method within the project. The monitoring analysis target group included disadvantaged jobseekers under the Vulcano Project managed by public employment centres, as well as external individuals not covered by the Vulcano Project but involved in control group functions for the analysis. Exar worked on mediating and facilitating connections between public employment centres and other

social welfare services, such as education, social service organizations, and social assistance services, all of which supported the same goal while playing different roles.

An in-depth analysis of personal and professional profiles was conducted, taking into account the diverse living conditions of disadvantaged individuals and their personal needs for professional integration, with a particular focus on individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or psychiatric patients.

To properly assess these complex individual situations, employment service practices must be closely linked to social welfare practices. The described approach emphasizes the importance of being able to assist the user not only with employment-related issues, but also with personal situations that may affect their prospects for professional integration. Collaboration with social services, employment centres, and mental health services is fundamental.

Social, healthcare, employment, and welfare services highly appreciated Exar contribution to the project, especially their expertise in conducting thorough, personalized analyses of both user profiles and company applications, resulting in highly effective, customized professional integration plans. The intervention by Exar's experts transformed the legal obligations of hiring individuals with disabilities into beneficial and positive opportunities for all parties involved, satisfying both employers and employees.

The experience gained through the Zunami, Vulcano, and Art+1 projects highlighted the impact that social and professional integration projects can have on facilitating the employment process for disadvantaged individuals. The employment rate of disabled beneficiaries was high, both in terms of the number of integration internships completed and the types of disabilities involved.

In addition to management activities, significant efforts were made to engage companies as much as possible in the workplace integration projects.

The high number of integration placements carried out jointly by the public employment office and Exar was also a result of the working method employed, which was based on close collaboration between two Exar case managers. These managers always worked together to find employment for the same disabled jobseeker. Specifically, one of the case managers focused more on providing counselling services for the beneficiary, while the other concentrated on actively seeking companies that were required to hire employees with disabilities. The process managed by the two Exar case managers was based on continuous internal confrontation, exchange of information, and feedback on the program's impact and outcomes, fully cooperating to achieve the expected result of professional integration.

Another key element of the project's success was the close collaboration with the employment centre staff.

As part of the project, a job placement centre was opened within the mental health branch in the reference area of the Piedmont region. In addition to the individuals typically referred by employment centres, this initiative enabled the inclusion of new disadvantaged individuals into this integration job placement program under the Vulcano project, with a particular focus on the goals supported by neuropsychiatric services.

Outcomes Projected:

- Promoting the role of the third sector (private non-governmental organizations) as a key stakeholder in the development of upskilling programs and inclusive employment services, as well as supporting non-standard strategies for the personal activation of disadvantaged jobseekers;
- Strengthening collaboration with businesses and companies to support the creation of high-quality jobs that foster social inclusion;

- Strengthening and revitalizing the local labour market by promoting the dissemination of effective best practices based on enhanced cross-sector collaboration between public and private stakeholders in the social and economic fields.

Case Study:

A person with a disability related to mental illness was employed as a result of enhanced cooperation between psychiatrists (doctors from the public mental health service), professional case managers from the Exar cooperative, and public employment offices. The collaboration between psychiatrists and case managers allowed, for example, for better adjustment of medication doses for the employee with a mental illness to meet the company's requirements regarding the daily number of work hours and the daily schedule. In fact, employees with mental health disorders had a limited ability to work due to the effects of certain sedative medications, especially in the morning hours. The enhanced cooperation between psychiatrists from the mental health service and case managers enabled the employee with psychiatric issues to be more active during scheduled working hours by adjusting the medication doses. This case illustrates how enhanced cooperation between mental health services and employment services was effective in overcoming specific challenges that could limit employees with psychiatric disabilities, further supporting the specific health-related needs of employees that have a real impact on their ability to work.

4.2.6 IPSASR Fobelli — Agricultural Vocational High School Institute

Participants/ Recipients:	<p>The Fobelli Institute is a state-run agricultural technical school that is approximately 60 years old. It offers three different specializations: Environmental Management, Food Processing, and Winemaking. Students attend the school for five years, and in addition to the core subjects, they study animal husbandry, agronomy, chemistry, farm management and marketing, biotechnology, and topography. The institute has a botanical garden, orchard, greenhouse, a farm with several cows, and cultivates rice, corn, and forage crops on 40 hectares of land. The students participate in projects aimed at improving local tourism and developing agricultural farms. They learn how to manage interventions to protect parks and protected areas, preventing environmental degradation.</p>
Type of Solution:	<p>Type of Solution</p> <p>Targeted job placement services supporting recent VET (Vocational Education and Training) graduates in transitioning from school to the world of work.</p> <p>The target groups of the project are:</p> <p>VET teachers</p> <p>They need increased opportunities for lifelong learning and skill updates in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the vocational education and training sector, as well as greater motivation to engage in innovative projects aimed at qualifying new practices and work methodologies in the inclusion of persons with disabilities.</p> <p>VET students</p> <p>Students with disabilities participating in technical and vocational training who require more opportunities to experiment with new teaching models</p>

and training tailored to their inclusion needs, as well as to adapt to changes emerging in the labour market.

Recent graduates

They need to stay connected with their VET school to receive continuous support in accessing their first job.

Quality Criteria for Job Inclusion Programs at the Fobelli Institute

Job placement services targeted at disabled VET students are based on the following quality criteria:

- Involvement of the person with disabilities, who actively participates in their own vocational education and professional integration path (while students with disabilities are typically kept in a more passive role in the learning process).
- A personalized path that better develops the personal skills, attitudes, and interests of students with disabilities.
- Enhanced cross-sector collaboration between public and private services related to education and professional integration for persons with disabilities (with a particular focus on cooperation between the VET school and the social consortium of municipalities to provide professional integration services to persons with disabilities during and after their studies).

The Fobelli Institute's Approach to Social Inclusion

The Fobelli Institute's model approach is based on the following key elements:

- **Active involvement of the person with disabilities:** Students with disabilities play an active role in their vocational education and their path to labour market inclusion, in contrast to the more passive role they are often placed in during the education process.

- **Individually tailored educational path:** The model is based on personalized programs that better develop the skills, interests, and aptitudes of students with disabilities.
- **Increased cross-sector collaboration:** An important aspect is the development of cooperation between public and private services related to education and labour market inclusion for persons with disabilities.
- **Promoting educational mobility and the European dimension of education:** A key element of the Fobelli approach to including students with disabilities is the promotion of educational mobility and providing opportunities for learning in an intercultural context. The Fobelli vocational school model supports the inclusion of disadvantaged individuals through Erasmus programs, which enhance their skills.

The Fobelli model focuses on increasing the benefits of educational mobility in the employment context. The impact of educational mobility is recognized as important for improving employability. The Fobelli school actively supports students in understanding the effects and impact of European mobility on their learning and future professional careers. It helps students, teachers, and employers understand the added value of international student mobility by using tools to measure its impact on their career prospects. Additionally, the school supports the evaluation, self-assessment, and awareness-building of mobility outcomes.

The Fobelli school also offers training for teachers on the European dimension of education, supporting the acquisition of soft skills by students in mobility programs, as well as the exchange of experiences with other European teachers in vocational education and inclusive methods.

Objectives:

The goal is to design and implement an inclusive education model for young students with disabilities. The education and job placement model aims to address the transition from vocational education to work, which is more problematic for young persons with disabilities. In fact, these students have significantly lower chances of entering and staying in the labour market.

Their employment rate is typically much lower, and they are disproportionately exposed to unemployment and exclusion.

The "Fobelli Vet School" aims to improve models and methods for utilizing tailored vocational internship services in VET (Vocational Education and Training) schools as a tool to support opportunities for disadvantaged young people, particularly in the agricultural sector.

The objective is to enhance the innovation and quality of job placement services in VET schools to facilitate the transition from education to the world of work. Students with special educational needs are at risk of segregation, and their chances of success are limited by a system that does not address their specific needs.

In particular, the Fobelli agricultural school seeks ways to maximize the benefits of VET school internships in terms of upskilling/reskilling. This is an effort to tackle the increased difficulties in professional integration faced by students with disabilities, starting with the development of their resources for active participation in socio-economic frameworks.

Implementation:

The school is implementing the "Progetto Ponte" project, aimed at providing support for the transition from school to work for students with disabilities. The bridging project has been organized as part of individualized support services for job placement.

The Fobelli school's inclusive education model for students with disabilities is based on the following key elements:

- An individualized annual action plan for the integration of students and the development of key skills required by students with disabilities to enter the labour market. The annual plan outlines objectives, resources invested, and expected learning outcomes. The action plan combines non-formal and formal education and supports student success. The school plans how to incorporate transition issues into its educational policy to ensure effective pathways from one level of education to another, from special schools to mainstream schools, and from education to employment.
- Scouting activities to find tailored professional inclusion opportunities in companies within the reference area, with a particular focus on the broad network of cooperative relationships with farms and companies in the agricultural sector.
- Facilitating local synergies among stakeholders in the education system, including the employment, social welfare, and health sectors, to strengthen inter-institutional complementarity.
- Improving initial and continuous vocational skills development for students with disabilities, involved in an educational process that combines formal, non-formal, and work-related opportunities, to provide them with the appropriate skills needed for employment.
- Active involvement of young people with disabilities, their parents, and teachers in updating goals related to skills development and professional integration according to the outcomes of the skills enhancement process.

Outcomes Projected:

- Increasing the opportunities available for VET (Vocational Education and Training) teachers in lifelong learning and skills updates in the vocational education and training sector, as well as enhancing motivation to engage in innovative projects aimed at social inclusion.
- Expanded opportunities for VET students to participate in technical and vocational training, with a greater chance to experiment with new teaching models and training tailored to their special needs and emerging changes in the labour market.
- Greater opportunities for recent graduates to stay connected with their vocational education and training school to receive support in accessing their first job.
- A lower percentage of recent graduates in disadvantaged situations at risk of exclusion, by providing necessary guidance even after completing their school pathway, to better support their professional integration.
- Reducing the number of graduates encountering difficulties in professional integration, also by assisting in expanding the local network of companies suitable for offering inclusive job opportunities.

Case Study:

The case study concerns a student at the end of his studies at an agricultural school, who had recently earned a three-year diploma and had an intellectual disability certification. The student remained employed at the Fobelli school with a job placement grant, activated jointly with Ciss (an inter-municipal consortium for social services known as Ciss Ossola). For the student, the grant provided an important opportunity to maintain his connection with the school and begin his journey toward independence. It addressed his need to continue developing both soft and hard skills, as well as the work abilities he had acquired during his studies. The opportunity to stay in a familiar environment, where his strengths were

recognized and appreciated, while receiving support for his individual needs, allowed the boy to experiment in a protected setting and experience a different role than when he was a student. The project had a significant impact on his confidence, especially since he was assigned the role of a peer teacher for first-year students. Among his tasks, the student was also responsible for helping the younger students maintain and renovate the school's educational orchard. In this way, the boy felt competent and embraced the role of a peer-teacher, building relationships with younger students who were just starting their school journey. This experience allowed him to value his own experience and develop important benefits in terms of responsibility and personal motivation to work, while also gaining professional development opportunities within the academic environment.

4.2.7 Aurive Social Cooperative — Volunteering as a Tool for Enhancing Soft Skills

Participants/ Recipients:	Aurive Social Cooperative
Type of Solution:	<p>The Aurive Social Cooperative coordinates the National Civic Service, a long-term volunteer program, very similar to an internship, that is highly effective in supporting the transition from school to work, especially for disadvantaged or disabled young people. Aurive primarily focuses on young people aged 18 to 28, with particular attention to those living in disadvantaged conditions and/or with disabilities (mental or physical). Many young people from this disadvantaged target group often face various barriers to social and professional integration due to their learning difficulties. However, since they are not officially certified as having a disability, they are unable to receive any form of official support through social welfare programs or employment integration services, despite the significant benefit such support would provide.</p> <p>Details of the Civic Service Program Format:</p> <p>Format: A long-term volunteer program that effectively strengthens skills to improve the employment prospects of disadvantaged young people.</p> <p>Duration: 25 hours per week over the course of one year.</p> <p>Agreement: A formal agreement between three parties (the government, the host organization with a supervisor, and the volunteer). The volunteer program is reimbursed at approximately €436.80 per month for the duration of the program.</p> <p>Mentorship: A mentor works with the beneficiary/volunteer of the program for at least 12 hours per week.</p> <p>Individualization: The beneficiary/volunteer is supported by an assigned individual supervisor.</p>

	<p>Training: The volunteer receives two types of training:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> General training on the values of the program (primarily related to active citizenship); Specialized training closely related to the specific volunteer project chosen by the volunteer. <p>The training is designed to equip volunteers with the skills needed to manage their assigned volunteer tasks throughout the year.</p>
Objectives:	<p>The objective of the good practice can be summarized as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligning the needs of disadvantaged young people in terms of upskilling and professional integration with the needs of host organizations that manage social services in social, cultural, or environmental areas. Enhancing the value of long-term volunteer experiences as a tool to prevent the risk of becoming NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) among disadvantaged young people. Strengthening the impact of long-term volunteer programs as a tool for enhancing soft skills, thereby increasing the employment prospects of disadvantaged individuals.
Implementation:	<p>The "National Civic Service," now referred to as the "Universal Civic Service," is a volunteer program directly funded by the Italian government. It has proven to be very effective in strengthening the soft skills required by young people (especially those in difficult situations) to enter the job market.</p> <p>The volunteer program is implemented in collaboration with public institutions, local NGOs, associations, or foundations that agree to host volunteers for the entire 12-month project period. Long-term volunteer</p>

programs are coordinated by social organizations, such as the Aurive Social Cooperative, which employs a specific method for managing civic service projects, consisting of the following six key steps:

Working Method 1: Volunteer Selection.

The selection of young people for long-term civic service volunteer projects is based on the following criteria: motivation to engage in a year-long experience, previous volunteer experience (not mandatory but appreciated), flexibility, and adaptability (e.g., ability to work in peer groups and within a hierarchical structure).

Professional Profiles Involved in the Selection Process.

Aurive social workers: Individuals with knowledge of current social policies, as well as issues related to the social inclusion of disadvantaged youth and/or those with disabilities; they collaborate with key stakeholders within public institutions active in the social sector; they have experience in non-formal education. OLP (Local Project Operator): A staff member from each host institution, acting as the mentor responsible for the selected volunteers.

Pre-selection.

Aurive offers individual counselling sessions to inform and assist prospective volunteers with:

- Choosing the most appropriate long-term volunteer program based on their skills and personal and professional development goals;
- Understanding the tasks involved in each available volunteer program;
- Becoming aware of the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Selection Methods.

- **Group sessions (workshops):**

During these group sessions, Aurive staff observe aspiring volunteers

working in teams and their interpersonal interactions to assess their relational and teamwork skills, as well as other relevant details for the selection process.

- **Individual interviews with volunteers:**

These interviews aim to deepen the understanding of candidates and discuss in detail their motivation, goals, skills, and alignment with the chosen volunteer project;

A visit to the potential host organization to introduce candidates to the local staff, familiarize them with the organization's activities, and gather feedback from volunteers about the work environment.

Working Method 2: Assigning Volunteers to Selected Projects

Goal: The assignment phase aims to find the best match between the volunteer and one of the available hosting places in the social, cultural, or environmental field.

Professional Profiles Involved in Assignment: Aurive staff with detailed knowledge of the available volunteer projects. Personnel involved in the assignment process also possess skills in human resource management, placement, and mentorship for young people participating in skill-building programs.

Working Method 3: Training Volunteers in Difficult Situations

As previously mentioned, the Universal Civic Service includes two types of training:

General training for young volunteers: Managed by Aurive, this training focuses on conveying the values of active citizenship, strengthening the connection between volunteers and public institutions (including the government branch supporting the program), and raising awareness about the rights and duties of citizens.

Specific training for young volunteers: This training equips volunteers with the skills necessary to manage their assigned tasks during the year-long

volunteer experience. The training method is primarily based on observing work, following the instructions of the OLP, and studying the working methods of the local staff. The future goal is to enrich this training with practices aimed at introducing and connecting volunteers with other organizations and social stakeholders within the same sector of the civic service project, thereby increasing the volunteer's employment prospects after the service.

Working Method 4: Tutoring and Monitoring Volunteers in Difficult Situations or with Disabilities.

Monitoring

Aurive organizes regular individual meetings to monitor volunteers, support them in their educational path, and manage or resolve any critical situations. The OLP mentor also helps volunteers find additional educational opportunities related to the volunteer experience and their educational goals to enhance the personal development impact of the volunteer period. On-demand services: The OLP mentor is always available to provide volunteers with individual support in case of a crisis or when guidance or assistance is needed.

Tutoring

Aurive employs two professional profiles in its tutoring system: Senior Tutor: A social worker experienced in providing individual coaching, counselling, and mentoring services;

Peer Tutor: A person close in age to the volunteer, with previous experience in civic service. Peer tutors can build a closer, more informal relationship with young volunteers in difficult situations, supporting them by sharing personal experiences from a similar volunteer project.

Working Method 5: Evaluation.

Evaluation is carried out both before the project starts and after it ends through questionnaires completed by participants and tutors. Group

meetings are held to assess the project's goals and the development of volunteer skills. The project outcomes are then reported. Volunteers are also sent an online questionnaire to provide a final evaluation of the entire experience, assessing their level of soft and hard skills by comparing the results of self-assessments conducted at the beginning and end of the project to recognize their development in improving employment prospects. Those involved in monitoring and tutoring the program support volunteers in the evaluation and self-assessment process.

Working Method 6: Certification.

Certification is the result of the self-assessment process described above. At the end of the validation process, a certificate is issued, signed by the host organization, that validates the soft and hard skills acquired by the volunteer, which are relevant for professional integration and can be used to enhance their resume.

Working Method 7: Complementary Services.

An individualized job placement service is available to volunteers upon request, supporting them after the completion of the year-long project.

It includes: assistance in improving resumes, networking with potential local employers, suggesting local job placement services, and providing information and referrals to other projects aimed at skill development or professional integration.

Outcomes Projected:

- 1) Development of "transition" programs specifically designed to support disadvantaged young people in developing key soft skills required by the labour market.
- 2) Promoting greater social awareness of the value of long-term social volunteer programs as effective tools for supporting the professional integration of disadvantaged individuals (especially recent graduates).

3) Enhancing the impact of key/quality elements of long-term volunteer programs with a particular focus on the following aspects:

- Duration: Disadvantaged young people benefited from stable, long-term experiences to develop their soft skills and grow both personally and professionally;
- Tutoring and mentoring: The volunteer receives individual support from the same tutor throughout the year.

4) Expanding and diversifying the impact of volunteer programs on soft skills, and employability skills for disadvantaged young people.

Case Study:

A young volunteer who had completed VET school was advised by the neuropsychiatry service to join the national civic service program (a long-term volunteer program). He suffered from anxiety disorders, which reduced his chances of successfully completing any medium- or long-term professional integration program. The national civic service proved to be an ideal fit for his professional integration needs, as it provided the support of a personal tutor he could rely on and consult with daily, allowing him to share ideas and strategies for adjusting his daily volunteer tasks to his strengths and weaknesses.

The volunteer was also supported in his social and professional integration by joining a peer group during training sessions shared with other volunteers active in the same program. He significantly benefited from the opportunity for social integration with his peers, which gave him a chance to further boost his self-esteem and motivation (key elements for professional integration as well). The program had a positive impact on him, increasing his self-esteem and enhancing his soft skills. The continuation of the program allowed the volunteer to connect with a specific job placement program, helping him transition from volunteering to closely related job opportunities.

4.2.8 IL SOGNO Social Cooperative and Nazareth Laboratory

Participants/	The social cooperative "Il Sogno" is a type b social enterprise in Italy, focused on job placement for disadvantaged individuals.
Recipients:	The "Il Sogno" cooperative manages the "Nazareth Laboratory", which offers occupational therapy services and facilitates job placement through internships and work programs. These programs are designed to fully integrate persons with disabilities into the labour market through industrial production processes.
Type of Solution:	<p>The "Nazareth Laboratory" was selected as a good practice because it combines both educational and rehabilitative activities with real work for the economy (assembly of parts or finished products ordered by specific companies)</p> <p>Since its establishment 25 years ago, in 1997, around forty people have been employed at the "Nazareth Laboratory".</p> <p>The work therapy laboratory is committed to using an industrial task analysis model that was developed to identify job positions that could potentially be filled by individuals with disabilities. This practice illustrates the Italian model of social cooperatives and their impact on the social integration of disadvantaged individuals within communities.</p>
Objectives:	The laboratory focuses on the goal of providing persons with disabilities the opportunity to experience a real professional situation. This means a setting composed of rules, objectives, challenges, deadlines, commitment, collaboration, development opportunities, and real compensation. An important goal is to ensure that every person with a disability who has skill development and employment mediation needs finds the right place

within the work team, fostering autonomy and improving skills and attitudes in the work context.

Implementation:

The occupational therapy laboratory collaborates with local companies that share its mission, demonstrating that an alternative mode of production, different from the current (often automated) processes in manufacturing companies, is possible. It offers high-quality products while investing in the enhancement of people's skills and network relationships.

The cooperative works closely with local services and public authorities that support occupational therapy activities, as well as job placement programs for persons with disabilities.

The Nazareth Laboratory of the Il Sogno social cooperative collaborates with the following entities:

- The Verbano Social Services Consortium and the Intermunicipal Social Services Consortium Cusio, which have initiated and financially supported their first professional internships since 1997;
- A wide network of business clients that provide services related to small manual tasks within industrial production. These companies chose the Nazareth laboratory as their service provider because they recognized the significance and social value of their choice compared to a traditional service provider.

The staff at the Nazareth Laboratory actively engage in seeking new business clients for collaboration and undertake actions aimed at including more persons with disabilities or those in difficult life situations into the work environment. In the Verbano Cusio Ossola province (northern Italy), many companies have the potential to outsource smaller processes and can adopt an inclusive work model, understanding that the laboratory promotes the centrality of the individual and the right of persons with disabilities to be empowered as workers, appreciating their diversity.

Outcomes projected:	<p>Thanks to the opportunity to work in a "protected and supported" environment, persons with disabilities, their caregivers, and social workers gain a better understanding of the needs that must be addressed to enable employment in the private sector. Daily activities in the laboratory promote the development of independence and responsibility, and the professional experience gained, even during the education stage, makes these individuals more competitive in the job market.</p>
Case Study:	<p>A man with a disability has been working for many years in the laboratory, developing and strengthening his skills useful for professional integration. This employment was the result of enhanced cross-sector collaboration between public employment services, social services, and a private social cooperative, which contributed to supporting the sustainability of the professional inclusion project.</p>

4.2.9 ANGSA VCO — Non-Profit Association

Participants/ Recipients:	<p>Angsa Vco is a local non-profit association dedicated to supporting persons with disabilities. Angsa Vco specifically focuses on people on the autism spectrum.</p>
Type of Solution:	<p>Angsa Vco supports skill-building programs aimed at increasing job integration prospects for individuals on the autism spectrum, primarily young people under 30 years old. The association has launched several occupational therapy projects, with a special focus on the "Autism'pizza" club, which is centred around events featuring the Italian specialty—pizza. During these events, individuals on the spectrum are supported in preparing pizza in the community oven in the village of Cavandone and distributing the product for free to interested participants. The funds from donations collected during the event are used to support Campedu, a summer camp for children on the spectrum.</p> <p>A similar scheme is being implemented through the association's "pizza taste-test" held at a former pizzeria located in the city of Verbania, which is now managed by a team of volunteers. "Taste-testing events" and "charity dinners" are regularly organized in collaboration with the volunteers running the restaurant to provide young people on the autism spectrum with the opportunity to experiment and practice providing food services.</p> <p>The work method is based on work groups formed by integrating personal skill profiles and aptitudes. Individuals on the spectrum conduct service simulations without customers to train themselves. They are then supported by specialists and volunteers in managing certain restaurant services for real customers from the community.</p> <p>In addition to the culinary/restaurant training in the form of the laboratory and events with customers, participants are also involved in caring for and maintaining a small community orchard in a park shared with a residential</p>

facility for psychiatric patients. In this activity, students from the Agricultural Institute of the VCO province also participate to provide mutual support and share skills in the field of agriculture.

Objectives:

Improvement and innovation of the model, goals, and working methods implemented by local non-governmental organizations to increase the impact of professional integration on the target group of persons with disabilities. Enhancing the impact of support services and projects aimed at strengthening the autonomy resources of persons with disabilities through soft skills development programs targeting young persons with disabilities who need upskilling and reskilling to enter and remain in the labour market.

In particular, the goal of professional integration pursued by the Angsa association and the Xenia social cooperative can be summarized as follows:

- Facilitating the vocational training of persons with disabilities by helping them develop and acquire specific skills in the agricultural and culinary sectors, which are key areas for integrative job positions.
- Recognizing and enhancing the contributions of social workers and volunteers with expertise in the culinary or gardening industries to help young people acquire the basic concepts and skills needed to work in the field of restoration.
- Offering young people on the autism spectrum real work-based learning opportunities to allow them to test their skills and become aware of their different attitudes and personal preferences.

Increasing the level of individualization and supporting the gradual acquisition of useful skills for more autonomous management of specific tasks in the field of restoration.

<p>Implementation:</p>	<p>Angsa, together with the Xenia social cooperative, has developed new projects and programs aimed at innovating and further qualifying activities that support the self-determination opportunities for persons with disabilities. The integration programs aim to help persons with disabilities become aware of their personal choices related to life autonomy and professional integration.</p> <p>The project is based on the assumption that a person with a disability, despite their challenges, is aware of adulthood, including the ability to make independent choices in the field of professional integration. Additionally, the project dedicates efforts to raising community awareness about the issues of independent living for persons with disabilities.</p> <p>Target group: Young individuals on the autism spectrum in the Verbania Cusio Ossola province, participating in vocational training courses in agricultural and culinary professions to achieve independence and autonomy in the future.</p> <p>Employment mediation goals for individuals on the autism spectrum are supported within the framework of a project called "Officina dei Mestieri" (Vocational Training Workshop), which aims to assist individuals on the autism spectrum in developing and strengthening specific skills that can be applied in the workplace.</p>
<p>Outcomes Projected:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased opportunities for persons with disabilities to experience a real work environment through the organization of "vocational training workshops" and "pizza taste-testing," where individuals with disabilities can receive support in performing key tasks related to gastronomy as independently and professionally as possible. • Greater awareness of the principles of an inclusive culture within companies in the restaurant sector and the local community, aimed at

increasing the availability of inclusive job opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum.

- Improved adaptation of the support offered to individuals with an autism profile to help them achieve the key milestones of adulthood, with a particular focus on employment opportunities.

Case Study:

A young man with a disability, aged 25, suffering from various conditions within the autism spectrum, who had already been supported by the Angsa and Xenia teams, encountered difficulties integrating into the labour market after finishing school.

He was involved in the "Craft Workshop" project as a protected environment where he could develop and practice both soft and hard skills in the field of restoration. Initially, he had low self-esteem and limited awareness of his personal abilities, as well as limited hard skills in restoration. By the end of his participation in the project, he had a clearer and more personalized plan for professional inclusion in the restoration field.

Thanks to the "Craft Workshop" project, the young man was able to bridge the gap in his opportunities for developing professional skills, gaining specific vocational abilities and work experience that were useful for creating a CV to assist in his job search.

He was assigned a mentor who supported him not only in improving his craft but also in adhering to work schedules, considering his personal difficulties and vulnerabilities to better prepare him for the world of work.

He was also supported by a qualified educational team, who, together with a group of 10 volunteers, taught him the theoretical and practical foundations of catering, sowing, and cultivating products used in food processing. Throughout his journey, he had the opportunity to collaborate with numerous volunteers assisting educators, as well as with some

students and professors from the Agricultural Institute of the Vco province. His parents also supported him, participating daily in planning their son's future together with the team and him.

4.2.10 Aff Down — Non-Profit Association

Participants/ Recipients:	Aff Down is a non-profit association of parents of young individuals with Down syndrome, united by the common goal of increasing the social and professional integration opportunities available to their children.
Type of Solution:	<p>The Aff Down association has developed a wide range of non-formal education opportunities aimed at meeting the needs of young people with Down syndrome in terms of integration and skill development.</p> <p>The association organizes programs that support young people with Down syndrome in learning key skills needed to find employment, expanding their knowledge, skills, and abilities, improving social skills, boosting self-esteem and motivation, and building interpersonal effectiveness.</p> <p>This approach is based on offering young people a set of initial, concrete, and supervised informal educational experiences in everyday life, outside the family and traditional social care models. Young people with Down syndrome are supported in facing test situations and further "training" their autonomy resources, which are crucial for professional integration.</p>
Objective:	Creating high-quality non-formal education programs to help persons with disabilities further appreciate the benefits of experiential learning, with the goal of enhancing job integration prospects by strengthening certain key soft and hard skills required in the labour market.

Implementation:	<p>The working method is based on integrating various leisure projects aimed at supporting the development and strengthening of skills essential for autonomy. Examples include skills such as independently doing grocery shopping or using public transportation. Additionally, various educational activities and experiences are organized to foster personal autonomy, such as time and financial management. Craft workshops and laboratories are also developed and managed, supporting the acquisition of manual skills such as knitting or handicrafts, preparing participants for future employment. The products created during these craft activities are sold, and the proceeds are used to fund the association's activities. An important element of the project is the initiative "la cena è servita!" ("dinner is served!"), carried out in collaboration with local restaurants. As part of this initiative, participants prepare and serve dinner during dedicated social events, providing a valuable opportunity to develop practical skills.</p>
Outcomes Projected:	<p>Improving the quality of support provided to individuals with Down syndrome aims to further appreciate the skills acquired through non-formal educational pathways. The enhanced support offered to participants with disabilities enables their greater involvement in active participation programs, which positively impact personal and professional development. A key element is better integration between work-based learning and non-formal learning, with particular emphasis on experiences gained through active involvement in social services. Such activities contribute to strengthening the abilities of individuals with Down syndrome to take on increasingly active roles in the community and to be recognized as full and active members of society.</p>

Case Study:

A woman in her 40s with Down syndrome, involved in numerous non-formal educational projects, has significantly improved her social and interpersonal skills, as well as her manual and hard skills essential for professional work. Through training focused on creative expression, particularly music lessons, she learned to play an instrument, which enhanced her manual abilities, later applied in a work environment. Thanks to the knowledge gained during music courses and other non-formal experiences supported by the association, she now works in a community laundry, supported by an employment grant activated by Verbania social services. This case illustrates how crucial the contribution of the non-profit association was in supporting individuals with disabilities, enabling them to acquire the skills necessary for workplace integration. The personalized approach, combined with the development of a broad range of skills to prepare for employment, played a decisive role in the success of the employment process.

5. Conclusions

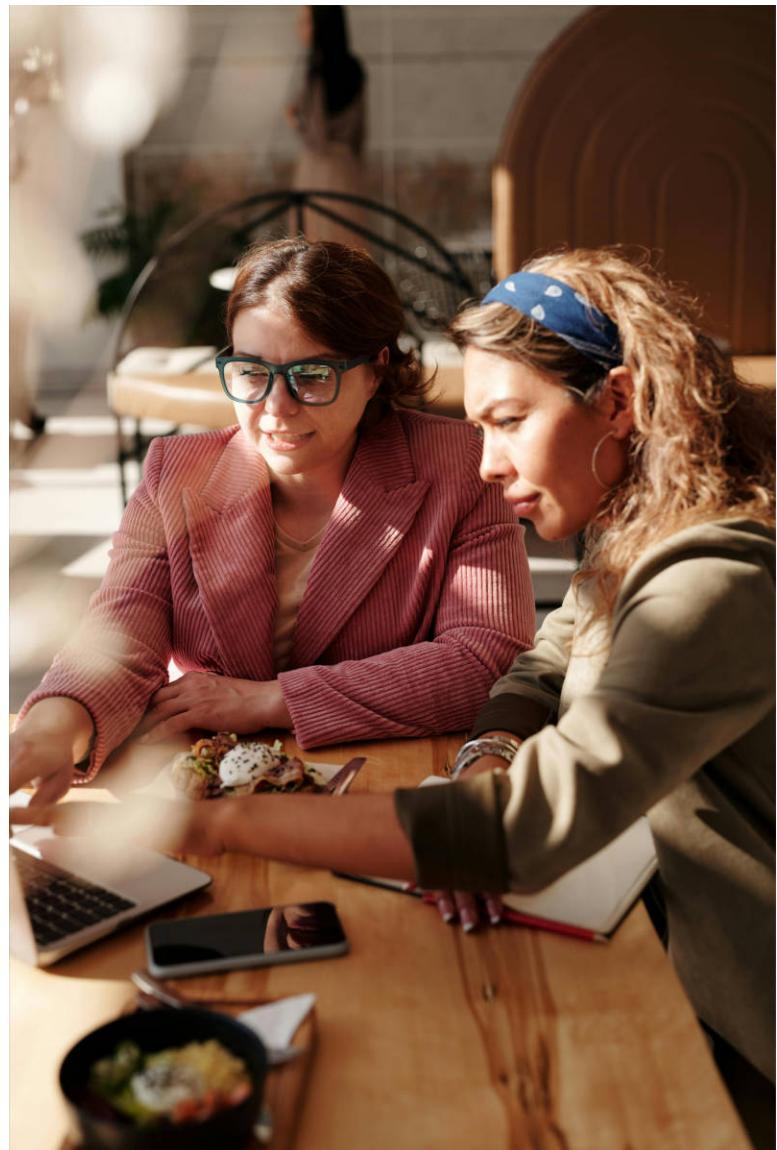
5.1 Best Practices in Poland — conclusions

We had the honor of inviting representatives from institutions in the private, public, and social sectors, who shared their experiences and proven solutions in the field of vocational activation. During the discussions, we also learned about various mechanisms for financing initiatives and models of effective cross-sector cooperation. This enriched our knowledge of innovative and effective methods to support persons with disabilities in the labour market.

The Foundation for Activation, the Municipal Employment Office in Olsztyn, and the Warmian-Masurian Regional Command of the Voluntary Labour Corps play key roles in job placement, helping individuals find appropriate internships and apprenticeships. They collaborate with employers, identifying their needs and matching candidates accordingly.

The Educational Institutions Complex in Olsztyn and the University of Warmia and Mazury (UWM) provide educational and training support. They prepare young people for entering the labour market by imparting practical knowledge and skills.

Warmian-Masurian Assembly of People with Disabilities (WMSON) represents the broad interests of persons with disabilities and supports their activation. It collaborates with other entities to tailor job offers to the individual needs of persons with disabilities, helping them find and maintain employment.



These institutions, in cooperation with PFRON (State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled People) and utilizing European Union funds, provide comprehensive financing for organizing internships and vocational training. National PFRON funds cover the costs of wages, insurance, and necessary workplace adaptations, while EU funds, including from the European Social Fund, provide additional support for training, career counselling, and integration activities. Such comprehensive financial support encourages employers to hire interns and trainees, ensuring high-quality activation programs.

The involvement of people in each of these institutions is key. Their knowledge, experience, and empathy effectively support young persons with disabilities. Individualized approaches, understanding needs, and helping to overcome barriers contribute to the success of activation programs.

Employers also benefit from increased knowledge within their teams on creating inclusive environments, minimizing stereotypes, fostering openness to diversity, and developing skills for managing multicultural teams. Internships and vocational training provide young people with valuable professional experience, allowing them to acquire practical skills and understand the realities of the labour market. This facilitates the start of their careers and increases employment opportunities. For persons with disabilities, this is often the first step toward independence and self-sufficiency.

Employers also gain the opportunity to recruit motivated young employees who bring fresh perspectives and energy to the company. By hiring persons with disabilities, companies build a positive image and fulfil the concept of corporate social responsibility. Additionally, diversity within teams fosters innovation and creativity, which can lead to better results and greater competitiveness in the market.

It should be emphasized that vocational integration programs for persons with disabilities, as well as selected best practices, have significant potential for transfer, as similar needs exist in every country.

The key elements and quality criteria common to best practices include:

- Supporting disadvantaged individuals in activating and enhancing soft and hard skills to improve their integration prospects;
- Reducing social and professional exclusion through programs that develop soft skills based on individual counselling and non-formal education (including volunteering);

- High potential for social innovation through employment mediation services tailored to the wide range of needs of persons with disabilities;
- Effectiveness in integrating various disadvantaged groups (persons with disabilities, the unemployed, low-skilled workers, immigrants, etc.);
- Development of many transferable skills and competencies among participants;
- Benefits for participants in terms of professional and social integration, civic engagement, and opportunities for social mobility.

The project enriched all participants, partners, social workers, and trainers, who became familiar with best practices in job mediation programs for persons with disabilities from various countries.



The analysis of the gathered practices highlighted the need to further strengthen cross-sector cooperation between schools, businesses, employment offices, and non-governmental organizations to better tailor educational activities within an adapted action plan for the vocational integration of disabled graduates from vocational education and training (VET) schools.

It is also essential to promote further exchange of best practices and strategies among stakeholders to increase employment opportunities for vocational school students. Strengthening the ability to create innovative activities that implement tools to improve the quality of job mediation services in vocational education through better internships and work-based learning opportunities is necessary. The quality of vocational education will also be enhanced by fostering stronger connections between vocational schools and industry companies.

In the Polish context, the most important factor is the involvement of individuals who create projects and apply for funding from PFRON or European Union funds. In our country, there is a lack of stable, systemic funding and a government program in this area. Therefore, the success of activation efforts largely depends on the determination and efforts of individuals and institutions seeking funding for specific initiatives. This situation poses a challenge but also highlights how crucial grassroots initiatives, creativity, and cooperation between various entities are for the effective vocational integration of persons with disabilities in Poland.

It is extremely significant to introduce new methods of vocational activation in VET schools, such as job coaching, Individual Employment Plans (IEP), or supported employment after graduation. These innovative approaches allow for better tailoring of support to the individual needs and abilities of people with disabilities, thereby increasing their chances in the labour market.

It is also crucial to assist young people in completing their education through career counselling, disability support offices at universities, or supported employment programs after graduation. This support should address the needs of disadvantaged individuals who have recently completed their studies or are still studying in the following areas:

- Developing self-awareness regarding personal and professional skills;
- Building a positive attitude toward work;
- Access to internships better aligned with their field of study, offering opportunities to develop both technical and soft skills, while considering aspects such as workplace communication, interview techniques, and self-development.

Comprehensive support for young persons with disabilities in these areas is key to their successful transition from education to the labour market. This should include workshops focused on soft skills development and labour market knowledge, individual career and educational counselling, assistance in finding suitable internships and apprenticeships, mentoring from experienced professionals, and support from a job coach or assistant during the initial employment period.

Such a multidimensional, individualized approach, involving various institutions and combining education with practical work experience, gives persons with disabilities the greatest chance for a smooth and lasting entry into the labour market. At the same time, it benefits employers by providing motivated and increasingly well-prepared employees. It also benefits society as a whole, as the vocational activation of

persons with disabilities not only reduces the cost of social benefits but, more importantly, creates a more inclusive and equitable labour market.

To more effectively support the vocational activation of VET (Vocational Education and Training) students in Poland, certain areas need to be addressed and changes implemented:



1. Strengthening collaboration between vocational schools and employers – It is essential to create partnerships where companies contribute to curricula, offer internships, and share insights about current labour market needs. Schools should be open to this collaboration and actively initiate it.
2. Developing career counselling – Students need support in discovering their aptitudes and planning their career paths early in their education. VET schools should provide access to professional career counselling to help young people make informed educational and career decisions.

3. Emphasizing the development of soft skills – Employers increasingly value skills such as communication, teamwork, creativity, and adaptability. VET schools should focus more on developing these competencies through appropriate teaching methods, group projects, simulations, etc.
4. Flexibility in curricula – Educational content and methods must be continuously adjusted to the changing needs of the labour market. There is a need to move away from rigid curricula toward a more flexible approach that incorporates employer input and industry trends.
5. Promoting entrepreneurship – Encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit and proactive attitude among students is important. Vocational schools can achieve this by organizing workshops, competitions, providing co-working spaces, and teaching the basics of starting a business.
6. Ensuring a smooth transition – Supporting students during their transition from school to the labour market is crucial. Mentorship programs, cooperation with employment offices, job fairs dedicated to VET graduates, and expanding employer networks can be beneficial.
7. Combating stereotypes and promoting vocational education and training – Negative stereotypes about vocational education still exist in society. It's essential to break these stereotypes and show young people how attractive and forward-looking vocational education can be. Promotional campaigns showcasing the success stories of graduates and development prospects in various industries are needed.

In recent years, there have been many positive changes in Poland's vocational education system. More vocational schools are establishing close partnerships with employers, students have more opportunities for practical job training, and curricula are gradually being modernized. There is also growing interest among young people in vocational education, which is a positive sign for the future.

However, much remains to be done. Key challenges include further improving the image of vocational education, ensuring better alignment of graduates' skills with labour market requires, and increasing the flexibility and innovation of the vocational education system. It is also crucial to provide adequate support for students with special educational needs, including those with disabilities.

Implementing these changes requires the involvement and cooperation of many stakeholders—vocational schools themselves, employers, policymakers, labour market institutions, and social organizations. It is also necessary to build social awareness and an inclusive workplace culture among employees. Only a holistic, systemic approach that takes into account the perspectives of various stakeholders will enable the creation of an effective model for vocational activation of VET students in Poland. This model should seamlessly integrate education with practice, develop skills sought by employers, and respond to the individual aptitudes and aspirations of students.

The positive changes already seen in Poland's vocational education and training system offer hope that with the right support and engagement from all parties, vocational education in Poland will increasingly prepare young people for entry into the labour market and for achieving professional success. This, in turn, will lead to greater competitiveness in the Polish economy and a higher quality of life for society as a whole.



5.2 Best Practices in Italy — Conclusions

Social workers who participated in the project observed and experienced how important and effective informal learning can be within vocational integration programs and internships. The most successful best practices are based on enhanced cross-sector cooperation between public employment services, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private enterprises, and vocational education and training (VET) centres. Both the staff and project participants were able to see first-hand how public institutions and non-profit organizations can effectively collaborate to support individuals in difficult life situations, enhancing their personal development, self-esteem, and motivation through participation in internship programs.

It is significant to emphasize that vocational integration programs for persons with disabilities, as well as selected best practices, have a high potential for transferability due to the fact that similar needs for vocational integration exist in every country. The key common elements of the selected best practices include:

- Disadvantaged individuals are supported in their activation and skill development, both hard and soft, which improves their job prospects.
- Programs that strengthen soft skills, based on personalized counselling and non-formal education methods (including volunteer programs), help reduce the social and professional exclusion of disadvantaged groups.
- The selected best practices demonstrate a significant potential for social innovation in vocational integration services, particularly in designing and implementing tailored services that address the wide range of needs of persons with disabilities. This offers the possibility of applying diverse models and actions related to vocational integration.
- These programs are effective for various disadvantaged groups, meaning they can be successfully applied not only to persons with disabilities but also to unemployed adults, low-skilled individuals, immigrants, and others.
- These programs enable participants to develop a wide range of skills and competencies.
- The soft skills developed in these programs are transferable to other aspects of participants' lives.
- Vocational integration programs benefit participants not only in terms of employment inclusion but also in social integration, reintegration, civic participation, and opportunities for social mobility.

The project proved valuable for participants, partner organizations, social workers, and trainers, who had the opportunity to learn about best practices in vocational integration programs for persons with disabilities from various countries.

The analysis of the collected best practices revealed the need to further strengthen cross-sector collaboration between schools, companies, employment services, and private NGOs to better coordinate educational activities within a personalized action plan for the vocational inclusion of students with disabilities in the VET system. Additionally, it is necessary to promote further actions that enable the exchange of best practices and strategies between partners to increase the employability of vocational school students.

