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Facilitating the disabled persons' insertion in the Labour market through a professional counselling process directed towards the certification of competences

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Abstract

Equality and diversity are essential values of a democratic society, many companies being interested nowadays in developing ample programs of Corporate Social Responsibility. An ever-increasing number of studies demonstrate that *the civic spirit and tolerance on the job are directly proportional to the team productivity and to the economic performance of the organisation*, and the Romanian state offers fiscal facilitations to encourage the civic spirit. However, although in Romania there live more than 600 000 people with disabilities (acc. to ANPH), while 50% of them could be integrated on the labour market (in their case, their handicap affects activity only partially), only 5% of them are actually hired.

In the herby study, our purposes are: to identify the resources that are necessary in the recruitment/selection process of the people with disabilities; to build up a specific counselling program of the people with disabilities with a view to fructifying their individual potential and to guaranteeing equal opportunities in their career development by means of a process of acknowledging the competences acquired as a result of their work experience, in protected workshops or outside them.

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1. Employment of the people with disabilities – from public statements to harsh realities

The integration on the labour market of the disabled people represents a highly difficult endeavour. The schools' lack of preoccupation to help these persons in the identification process of those qualities and abilities that might allow their qualification for various positions; the existing incongruities between the professional training system and the Romanian Occupational Code; the absence of or the inappropriate functioning of the professional counselling/orientation services destined for this category are only some of the reasons why this endeavour turns out to be so difficult (see Honey, Meager, Williams, 1993).

According to the research carried out by numerous international NGOs and to the information offered by the European institutions portal, ec.europa.eu, out of the 493 million inhabitants of the European Union, almost 200 million are employed in a state or private-owned company, of which 12% (22 million) representing people with disabilities. The percentage may seem rather high, if we take into consideration that less than half of the total

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number of persons with disabilities (45 million) who have the ability to be employed, have a job today, we will understand the dissatisfaction manifested by the European officials.

In Romania, the statistics demonstrate the existence of a sadder situation. Although the representatives of the National Authority for People with Disabilities speak about the existence of an ascendant tendency as concerns the employment rate of the people with disabilities, as we have been witnessing, for the last three years, the doubling of this rate, the statistics are not encouraging at all.

We show some data which may confirm it.

Table 1. The number of people with disabilities employed by 31.03.2010

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Somatical</i>	<i>Auditory</i>	<i>Visual</i>	<i>Mental</i>	<i>Psychical</i>	<i>Associated</i>	<i>HIV/AIDS</i>	<i>Rare diseases</i>	<i>Deafness-blindness</i>
<i>People with disabilities ADULTS</i>	624,974	123,710	126,912	20,940	116,718	105,514	80,213	38,944	5,219	5,309	465
<i>People with disabilities employed</i>	29,050	6,855	11,316	3,419	3,317	927	1,477	1,050	200	401	88

Acc. to ANPH, 2010

Consequently, we notice, according to the ANPH's data, that although there are more than 600 000 people with disabilities in our country, only 5.54% of them have a job. The low level of the state's involvement in the labour integration process of the people with disabilities, the disinterest shown by companies with respect to the procedures and the benefits that might result from the employment of the people with disabilities, the difficulty faced during the adaptation process of the infrastructure of companies to the need of this category of people, the persistence of some discriminatory behaviours of employers and of the other employees are only some of the reasons that explain this extremely low percentage.

2. the legislation and national priorities regarding the social protection, integration and inclusion of the people with disabilities

According to the law, **people with disabilities** are those persons who, due to some physical, mental or sensorial affection, lack the abilities to carry out normal daily activities, thus requiring protection measures to support their recovery, integration and social inclusion.

The assimilation of the values of a democratic state and the affiliation to the European Community have led, in the last years, to the focusing of great efforts upon the development of a protective legislative framework against inequality. The recent legislation regarding the protection and the promotion of the rights of the people with disabilities falls in this trend, and some of the legislative documents (at national level) that circumscribe the activity in the field are the following:

- ◆ Law 448/ 2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the people with disabilities;
- ◆ GD 628/2009 Regarding some implementation measures of the activities stipulated in the national program in the field of protection the rights of the people with disabilities "Restructuring old-fashioned institutions destined for adult people with disabilities and setting up residential-type alternative services";
- ◆ GD 430/2008 on the approval of the Methodology regarding the organisation and operation of the evaluation commission for adult people with disabilities;
- ◆ GD 1175/2005 on the approval of the National Strategy on the social protection, integration and inclusion of the people with disabilities in Romania for the period between 2006 and 2013;
- ◆ GD 329/2003 on the approval of the frame-regulations for the organisation and operation of the special protection institutions for people with disabilities.

However, because of the fact that the legislative measures themselves do not represent a guarantee of setting up social equality, it is necessary they should be supplemented with ample actions in this respect. Therefore, the National Action Plan on the implementation of the National strategy for the social protection, integration and

inclusion of the people with disabilities for the period between 2006 and 2013, “Equal opportunities for the people with disabilities – a society without discrimination” aims at the following objectives:

- ◆ *The promotion of social integration of the people with disabilities as active citizens who are able to control their own lives*
- ◆ *Offering support for the families who have persons with disabilities*
- ◆ *Increase of the employment level for the people with disabilities*

Due to the fact that the target of our study is to develop upon the problems of the last objective, we shall focus our attention upon some possible solutions to carry it out (acc. to the National Strategy on the social protection, integration and inclusion of the people with disabilities for the period between 2006 and 2013):

- ◆ *effective early support*: to guarantee schooling and professionalization of all the people with disabilities, irrespective of the place in which they find themselves, by observing their individual development needs; to adapt the instruments that are specific to education to the individual needs of the people with disabilities; to highlight the importance of evaluating abilities and especially the social-professional abilities of the people with disabilities; to develop, diversify, support financially the programs regarding the professional orientation and reorientation of the people with disabilities; to correlate the professional training of the people with disabilities with the labour market requirements; to support the programs whose target is the development of the abilities of the people with disabilities, irrespective of their age.
- ◆ *the involvement of employers*: to design and adapt workplaces in such a way as they should become available to the persons with disabilities; to support employers with logistics and financially with a view to carrying out the adaptation of the workplaces according to the individual needs of the employed person with disabilities; to develop ways of stimulating employers with a view to employing and maintaining the workplace of the persons with disabilities; to promote and to ensure that employers know the right of work of the people with disabilities.
- ◆ *the improvement of the professional education and training system*: to promote the access to education and professional training of the people with disabilities, irrespective of the type and level of the disability; to create the conditions and the services for the person with disability so that he/she should be able to choose the professional and workplace conversion or reconversion, according to his/her functional potential; to develop programs, in collaboration or partnership with legal persons, public or private, with religion institutions acknowledged by the law, whose target is creating opportunities for the development of the abilities of the people with disabilities; to ensure equal access of the persons with disabilities to the training and promotion opportunities at the workplace.
- ◆ *the improvement of support services with a view to developing and creating support services for the people with disabilities at the workplace*: to promote an open working environment, inclusive and accessible for the people with disabilities; to promote the acknowledgement of capacities, abilities and contribution of the people with disabilities at the workplace and on the labour market and, implicitly, to fight against prejudices in the field; to create the conditions for increasing the chances of the people with disabilities to be employed and to be promoted in their career on the free labour market and especially in the public sector; to diversify and to support social services, as follows: counselling for the person with disabilities and his/her family, information for employers, etc.

The increase of the number of workplaces appropriate for the activation of the people with disabilities who have work potential with a view to their employment – according to GD no. 39/2009, represents one of the daring objectives that were put forward in the current governing program. Some of the actions carried out with a view to achieving this objective are included in the Measure Plan (put forward by ANHP) for 2010 and aim at: the development/adoption/implementation of the *Plan on the increase of the employment level of the workforce for the people with disabilities*; the analysis of the Romanian and European legislation in the field of employment of the people with disabilities with a view to its harmonisation; the development of partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organisations involved in the field of employment; the promotion of developing ways of employment for the people with disabilities; the identification of financing sources and the development of projects aiming at the increase of the social inclusion of the people with disabilities.

From the perspective of education and learning, the route, although difficult, has recorded several fundamental tendencies in the last several years:

- ◆ reformulation and change of the basic conceptions and terms in the field: special education, disability, special education needs, normalization, fructification (of the social roles) and integration in community;

- ✦ reconsideration of the specific education and assistance models, highlighting the progressive tendency of getting the education place and conditions of the people with disabilities close to the opportunities ensured by the diversification of the social, professional forms of integration into community;
- ✦ the complex action of altering the social attitude and of the legislation regarding the general problem of disabilities and – in a wider context – regarding inter-human diversity and differences.

3. From ascertaining analyses to concrete improving intervention: a professional counselling/orientation program for the people with disabilities

3.1. Initial elements of the empirical endeavour

The urgent need to increase the rate of professional insertion of the people with disabilities, under the conditions of an average or low professional and educational training, represented the core around which we built up the project *Facilitating professional insertion of the people with disabilities by means of a certification process of the competences acquired on other ways than the formal ones*.

The project has been developed within the Career Counselling and Orientation Centre of the Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, in collaboration with partners from the public sector (General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection; County Employment Agency) and from the private sector (non-governmental organisations), the *purpose* being that of developing an activity of acknowledging and validating the experience acquired by the people with disabilities on other ways than the formal ones.

The objectives included in the achievement of this purpose aim at: the development of some instruments to acknowledge and validate the competences acquired on other ways than the formal ones, instruments adapted to the needs of the people with disabilities; the implementation of a device to accompany the people with disabilities in the process of competence certification; the delimitation of those elements that facilitate insertion on the labour market of the people with disabilities.

3.2. Action plan

We consider appropriate for the improvement of the social-professional integration process of the people with disabilities the following *activities*:

- ✦ The informing and rendering sensitive the community regarding the problems specific to the professional integration of the people with disabilities;
- ✦ The identification of the resources those are required for the professional evaluation/recruitment/selection process of the people with disabilities;
- ✦ Rendering valuable the individual potential with a view to ensuring equal opportunities as regards career development;
- ✦ Counselling/accompanying of the people with disabilities in the certification process of the competences acquired by means of the work experiences within protected workshops or outside them.

With a view to making these activities effective, there shall be developed both instruments that identify and render valuable the competences acquired by the people with disabilities on other ways than the formal ones and operation guidelines of these instruments destined for the professionals in the field of counselling and also to direct beneficiaries.

To the same extent, it is important to develop and implement a program that should aim at the information and awareness of employers and employees as well regarding the necessity for the certification of the competences acquired on non-formal or informal ways. This objective will be achieved by developing a manual with the following structure:

- ✦ Legislative substantiation
- ✦ Principles of the certification process of the professional competences obtained by other ways than the formal ones: *validity; credibility; impartiality; flexibility; confidentiality; simplicity*
- ✦ The stages of the evaluation process of professional competences
 - The analysis of the client's request
 - Accompanying the client in the process of reviewing experiences
 - Competence evaluation in front of a commission
- ✦ The advantages of competence certification

3.3. Expected results

We stipulate that the carrying out of these activities, at the level of the target public, on the short run, will lead to the increase of trust in one's own forces, awareness of one's own potential, reviewing of all work experiences and rendering them valuable by means of a competence certification process and, on the long run, the increase of their autonomy level as a result of obtaining a job and, implicitly, of some income.

As far as the impact of the project impact at regional level is concerned, we expect that, on a short run, it should result in the sensitization of employers concerning the specific needs of the people with disabilities; making employers aware regarding the benefits of employing people with disabilities. These will generate, on the long run, the increase of the employment level of the people with disabilities, the decrease of the unemployment rate, the development of the corporate social responsibility.

3.4. Guaranteeing sustainability and disseminating information

The project sustainability can be guaranteed by creating, within the Career Counselling and Orientation Centre in the Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti of a *counselling service* destined for people with disabilities. Within it, there shall be teams made up of psychologists, career counsellors, specialists in the field of special psychopedagogy.

The dissemination actions of the project data shall be carried out with the help of the local partners: Motivation Romania foundation (through the work integration program of the people with disabilities), County Employment Agency (by means of some briefing meetings regarding the vacant jobs in various fields of activity) etc.

4. Preliminary conclusions

Through its objectives, our project «*Facilitating professional insertion of the people with disabilities by means of a certification process of the competences acquired on other ways than the formal ones*» contributes to the achievement of an objective of priority of the National strategy for the social protection, integration and inclusion of people with disabilities in the period between 2006 and 2013, namely: *the promotion of social integration of the people with disabilities as active citizens who are able to control their own lives*. The acknowledgement and certification of the competences acquired on other ways than the formal ones shall lead to a better professional insertion, to increased remuneration (as a result of performing skilled work) and, consequently, to the increase of the autonomy level of the person with disabilities. Thus, deciding how his/her life will be organised, managing *the complementary personal budget*, choosing the services he/she needs, as well as their suppliers, based on some individual service contracts – all these become actions in which the person with disabilities is fully involved.

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