



# Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics

## JIME

ISSN 2601 - 5749, ISSN-L 2601 - 5749

published by

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism

Iasi, Romania

[www.csesm.org](http://www.csesm.org)

**TABLE OF CONTENT**

Editorial.....	3
Iulian Warter	
The Personality of Traits in Shaping Leadership Behavior for Local Government Performance in Indonesian Cases: Facet-Level Analysis .....	5
Yadhi Kowara, Umi Narimawati, Justine Tanuwijaya	
Moses and Modern Leadership: Lessons in Purpose-Driven Servant Leadership for The Age of Disruption .....	25
Hershey H. Friedman, Xianfang Zeng	
The Indirect Effect of Active Procrastination in the Relationship Between ChatGPT Use in Academic Contexts and ChatGPT-Related Psychological Distress .....	45
Tudor-Daniel Huțul, Adina Karner-Huțuleac, Alexia-Gabriela Roman, Ștefana Pintilie, Andrei-Marian Mariș, Cristiana Honțaru, Ion Fărcășan	
Conscientious Objection in Medical Practice .....	69
Mircea Gelu Buta, Iulia Alexandra Oltean	
Barriers and Opportunities in the Employment Inclusion of People with Disabilities. A Qualitative Analysis of Employers' and People with Disabilities' Perspectives .....	75
Irina-Cristina Pachița, Alois Gherguț	
Ethical Perspectives in Sociological Research on Drug Use .....	93
Cristina Gavriluță, Ramona Ciobanu, Beatrice Gabriela Ioan	

# BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYERS' AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES' PERSPECTIVES

Irina-Cristina Pachița<sup>1,\*</sup>, Alois Gherguț<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education Sciences, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Romania

\*corresponding author, E-mail: irina.pachita@uaic.ro

## Abstract

Despite a greater emphasis on workplace inclusion standards, employment inclusion for people with disabilities (PwD) continues to be a major concern. From the perspectives of employers and PwD, this study investigates the opportunities and barriers that shape the professional experiences of PwD. The study employed a qualitative approach, using open-ended questions in a questionnaire to collect data. Ten employers and eight people with various disabilities (visual, hearing, and physical) comprised the 18 research participants. A variety of barriers to workplace inclusion were identified in the thematic analysis, including physical accessibility, stereotypes, a lack of institutional support, and some confusion about the required workplace modifications. Participants also noted various methods to increase the degree of inclusion, including flexible work schedules, continuous professional training for organizations and PwD, counseling, and increased organizational awareness of disabilities. These results suggest a gap between the official pledges to inclusivity and the realities of the workplace. To establish organizational settings that effectively promote the participation and professional development of PwD, the research emphasizes the need for integrated efforts across organizational, educational, and public policy levels.

**Keywords:** disability inclusion; employment barriers; employer perceptions; workplace accessibility; people with disabilities; qualitative study;

## Introduction

There have been several advancements in Romanian legislation and public policy on the employment inclusion of people with disabilities (PwD) as a result of alignment with European standards. However, the reality of the labor market and national data on the employability of PwD show a high degree of barriers to employment (Sampana & De la cruz, 2020) and a low degree of real participation in establishing equitable and accessible work environments for PwD. In order to reduce inequality and promote the active engagement of all community members, it is essential to design consistent policies and approaches, adjust infrastructure, and implement an organizational culture based on respect and solidarity (Pachița, 2024). Therefore, a qualitative approach is essential for a thorough investigation into the experiences of employers and PwD. Comprehending the perspectives of these two groups is vital for elucidating relational dynamics, identifying barriers to inclusion, and formulating organizational strategies grounded in practical experiences and prevailing labor market realities. This study, therefore, focuses on the opportunities and barriers to the employment inclusion of PwD, aiming to elucidate the institutional, structural, and attitudinal challenges that hinder their workforce participation. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore

strategies and approaches that can actively and sustainably facilitate the inclusion of PwD within the professional sphere.

### **Theoretical frameworks for exploring PwD employment inclusion**

According to Colella and Bruyère (2011), the context of employment inclusion encompasses more than the simple presence of PwD inside organizational structures; hence, it is important to distinguish between inclusion and integration in the workplace. While inclusion entails fundamental systemic changes intended to address and accommodate the diverse needs of PwD actively, integration refers to placing PwD in various roles without making the necessary adjustments to the organizational environment (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian, 2014). Furthermore, employment inclusion can be understood as an organizational ethos that cultivates a communal spirit among all staff, encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness, and values diversity to enable each individual to engage and contribute to their maximum potential (World Health Organization & The World Bank, 2011). Despite the widespread declarations of inclusivity by numerous organizations, this principle frequently fails to be prioritized in practical application. The incorporation of the skills, distinct viewpoints, and potential contributions of PwD is often obstructed by various obstacles, thereby leading to less inclusive organizational practice (Collier, 2016). Barnes and Mercer (2005) and Goodley (2017) argue that barriers to inclusion extend beyond physical limitations, such as insufficient spatial adjustments or a lack of accessible routes. They also include attitudinal obstacles, such as stereotypes and biases, which prevent the recognition of PwD as potentially valuable employees.

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) is a salient theoretical standpoint on employment inclusion, particularly regarding its advantages for PwD. In the context of psychological well-being, motivation, and individual performance, this theory provides a framework that emphasizes the importance of satisfying the psychological needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Accordingly, creating and establishing support systems to address these fundamental psychological needs for PwD, enhancing their dedication to the company, and optimizing their potential at work are the main goals of an inclusive organizational environment (Verdugo et al., 2009). At the same time, Becker (1983), tapping into human capital theory, highlights that understanding the fundamental dynamics of employment inclusion can lead to strategic investments in education, training, and the accumulation of relevant experience to enhance individual productivity and the organization's economic competitiveness. Equal possibilities and a nondiscriminatory environment in terms of access and development opportunities are seen to be advantageous for both PwD and organizations when it comes to their inclusion (Rimmerman, 2013).

The manner in which disability is perceived and portrayed in society has a major effect on organizational attitudes and practices meant to guarantee the inclusion of PwD (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). Models of disability serve as the foundation for how PwD are perceived in the context of workplace inclusion, influencing attitudes toward them. The medical model emphasizes the limits of the individual and explores solutions for the prevention, treatment, and care of PwD, viewing disability as a personal flaw (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). In contrast to the medical model, the social model of disability contends that a person's physical limitations and an environment that is insufficient and unsuited to their particular needs interact in a complex manner, resulting in a disability (Oliver, 1990; Swain, 2004). According to this viewpoint, barriers to employment inclusion are societal rather than personal. They result from a general lack of accessibility in infrastructure, information, and communication (Mohapatra et al., 2024) as well as from discriminatory attitudes and

organizational practices that do not take into consideration the diversity of needs and abilities (Verulava & Bedianashvili, 2021).

### The present study

This study aims to explore the barriers and opportunities involved in the employment inclusion process of PwD. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the research focuses on the detailed analysis of subjective experiences, elaborated interpretations, and articulated perspectives of two groups of actors with a decisive influence in this field: employers, in their capacity as the main providers of employment opportunities, and PwD, as direct beneficiaries or as subjects of inclusion or employment exclusion processes.

### Method

#### Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 18 individuals, 10 employers, and 8 people with various disabilities, as well as company representatives holding positions as managers or human resources inspectors. Regarding employers, they reported current areas of activity such as services, sales, real estate, recruitment, and training, with half having prior experience hiring PwD, while the other half reported no such experience. In the case of existing experience, the people they hired had physical, sensory, and locomotor disabilities. Regarding PwD, their average age was 40 years, and among the reported disabilities, they mentioned physical (including neuromotor), hearing, and visual disabilities, all having prior experience in various fields of work.

Table 1a. Research sample characteristics - employers (N=10)

Variable	N	%
<b>Sex</b>		
<i>Male</i>	3	30
<i>Female</i>	7	70
<b>Education</b>		
<i>Bachelor</i>	4	40
<i>Master</i>	6	60
<b>Company size</b>		
<i>Under 500 employees</i>	7	70
<i>Between 500 and 1000 employees</i>	1	10
<i>Over 1000 employees</i>	2	20

Table 1b. Research sample characteristics – PwD (N=8)

Variable	N	%
<b>Sex</b>		
<i>Male</i>	5	62.5
<i>Female</i>	3	37.5
<b>Education</b>		
<i>Secondary School</i>	1	12.5
<i>High School</i>	6	75
<i>Bachelor</i>	1	12.5
<b>Disability type</b>		
<i>Physical disability</i>	4	50
<i>Visual disability</i>	2	25
<i>Hearing disability</i>	2	25

The research was conducted within an interpretative qualitative design with a phenomenological orientation, emphasizing a deep understanding of participants' experiences and social representations (Creswell, 2007). An open-ended questionnaire with 10 main questions was used to collect narrative responses, which were then evaluated. Social media groups on Facebook and LinkedIn were used to recruit participants. Informed consent highlighted the respondents' right to withdraw from the research at any time without repercussions, and participation was entirely voluntary. The estimated average time to complete the questions was approximately 25 minutes. Participants were assured that the information collected would be private, used solely for research purposes, and that their participation was voluntary. The study, conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the 2013 Declaration of Helsinki, received approval from the Ethics Board of the university to which the authors are affiliated.

### **Measures**

Participants were invited to respond to a series of open-ended questions, described in detail in the Results section, following completion of the first segment of the questionnaire, which focused on gathering pertinent demographic data. The purpose of the questions was to understand better their perspectives, experiences, and thoughts on the obstacles to and prospects for the employment inclusion of PwD, as well as the associated support strategies. The questions, which addressed both real-life recruitment experience and perceptions of the integration, support, and difficulties encountered in employing PwD from both employers' and PwD' perspectives, were developed based on previous literature on disability inclusion, employment barriers, workplace accommodations, and perceived support needs.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a technique considered rigorous for identifying, organizing, and interpreting meaningful patterns of meaning in a qualitative database (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The procedure followed the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), a six-step model that involves the following stages: (1) thorough familiarization with the collected data through complete transcription and reflective reading of the responses; (2) generating initial codes by extracting fragments relevant to the research purpose; (3) identifying themes by grouping codes into broader conceptual units; (4) revising themes based on their internal coherence and consistency with the entire dataset; (5) defining and naming themes and subthemes; and (6) conducting a coherent narrative analysis that places these themes within an interpretive framework. To avoid applying pre-established categories when coding, we used an inductive coding method, which allowed themes to emerge from participants' responses. To maintain the genuineness and individuality of the experiences that the participants recounted, coding was carried out by employing the in-vivo approach (Saldaña, 2013). To enhance academic rigor, the research team repeatedly reviewed the coding process, and the identified themes were continuously compared with the original data excerpts to ensure coherence and fidelity to the participants' perspectives. Representative quotes were selected to illustrate each theme and maintain transparency in interpreting the qualitative results.

## **Results**

### **Employers's perspective**

**Question 1a.** *How do you perceive the employment of PwD in your organization?*

The central theme regarding how employers perceive hiring PwD in their companies is that it is framed as an opportunity characterized by transparency and constructive efforts, though occasionally with no tangible outcomes (Table 2). An analysis of all responses revealed a range of viewpoints toward hiring PwD. While some employers report challenges, including stigmatization, a lack of promotion opportunities, or difficulties in implementing an inclusive organizational culture, others point out openness and tangible initiatives (e.g., efforts toward inclusion, roles adapted to the abilities of PwD, or opportunities to work from home).

Table 2. Answers to question 1a. *How do you perceive the employment of PwD in your organization?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Openness toward hiring PwD	"We have made efforts to hire people with disabilities; we have been open to this idea, but for various reasons, we have not managed to finalize any hiring." "We are open to collaborating with people with disabilities, especially since we operate 100% remotely." "We are open to collaborating with them, and we have always sought to offer them jobs that highlight their strengths without them having to make compromises."	4	40%
Perception of hiring PwD as a difficult process	"It is a taboo, even though we have employees with disabilities, and they have a disability certificate, they are not promoted." "Quite arduous."	3	30%
Perception of employment as an inclusive endeavor	"In our organization, we promote an inclusive work environment. We want to integrate people with disabilities as well, which is why we create conditions for them." "Our perception is a positive one. We believe that if there is a possibility and suitable roles are identified, hiring people with disabilities is a very good thing. We believe that if there is a possibility and suitable roles are identified, hiring people with disabilities is a very good thing."	3	30%

**Question 2a.** *What do you consider to be the specific benefits of employing PwD?*

The most common responses show a split between seeing employment as a way to include people with social benefits and feeling a lack of real advantages for the organization. Some employers point out the positive effects of including PwD in the workforce, focusing on the stability and sense of usefulness and belonging they experience through work. Others, however, say they do not see specific benefits, viewing employment more as a duty than a chance. Some participants highlight their contributions to diversity and inclusion within the organization by aligning with the company's diversity and inclusion policies as part of their social responsibility. In contrast, others mention financial benefits, such as tax deductions, as potential incentives for this effort (Table 3).

Table 3. Answers to Question 2a. *What do you consider to be the specific benefits of employing PwD?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
----------------	--------------------	---	---

The stability and inclusion of PwD.	"The integration of people and the fact that they feel useful is the greatest gain." "People with disabilities tend to be more stable..." "More benefits for them - to feel wanted and useful."	3	30%
Lack of specific benefits	"I have not identified specific concrete benefits." "Honestly, I cannot identify a specific benefit..." "There are no benefits, just obligations."	3	30%
Diversity and inclusion at the organizational level	"The company checks off inclusion and diversity..." "The specific benefits would be related to employee diversity..."	2	20%
Financial benefits	"The possibility of benefiting from certain tax deductions when hiring people with disabilities."	2	20%

**Question 3a.** *What are your concerns regarding the employment of PwD?*

Employers' responses highlight three major areas of potential concern. The first concerns the lack of physical accessibility and the difficulty of accommodating PwD in the workplace, especially due to inadequate workplace infrastructure. The second central theme concerns fears regarding professional performance and safety, delays in task delivery, lack of accountability, or accident risks. Another category of responses addresses the risk of discrimination and the challenges of genuine inclusion within the team. There are also isolated mentions that do not express fears but signal a lack of contacts or recruitment opportunities (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Answers to Question 3a. *What are your concerns regarding the employment of PwD?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Accessibility and adaptability	"I think the biggest problem is accessibility." " We, for example, do not have a ramp or a method to access the floors other than by stairs". "Among the concerns could be their adaptation to the workplace."	3	30%
Performance and workplace safety	"Delivering on time what was requested." "Accidents at work due to lack of attention." "It sometimes happens that they do not have enough confidence in themselves, and for this reason, they do not take on responsibilities."	3	30%
Discrimination and exclusion	"Their discrimination by colleagues." "Exclusion."	2	20%
Lack of fears	"We do not have certain fears, but we haven't identified available people."	2	20%

**Question 4a.** *What do you think are the main barriers that arise in the recruitment and inclusion process of PwD?*

The most frequently mentioned barriers are prejudices and misconceptions about disabilities, which affect both how these individuals are perceived and their confidence in

engaging professionally. The lack of accessibility and adapted infrastructure at the company level is another major difficulty, especially for people with mobility disabilities. Additionally, stereotypes related to work capacity and the absence of an inclusive organizational culture are recognized by employers as barriers to effective inclusion. In some fields, specific working conditions, such as shift work or specific job requirements, can become additional factors of exclusion (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Answers to Question 4a. *What do you think are the main barriers that arise in the recruitment and inclusion process of PwD?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Prejudices and misconceptions	"I have met people with disabilities who did not want to obtain a disability certificate because of how they might be perceived by those around them." "The lack of understanding of the situation and the opportunities that could exist." "The fact that a person has a disability does not mean they are not good at an activity. Prejudices."	3	30%
Accessibility and infrastructure	"On the integration side, I see a problem only with the lack of accessibility, if they were in a wheelchair." "The lack of technologies for people with disabilities and the misconceptions about this community."	3	30%
Stereotypes and the lack of an inclusive organizational culture	"Stereotypes, the lack of an inclusive organizational culture on both sides." "Stereotypes related to their ability to perform tasks."	2	20%
Specific working conditions (shifts, nature of the work)	"Considering that the field of activity involves working in 3 shifts, they are considered for these night shifts." "The specific nature of the work itself can represent a barrier, depending on the type of disability and the job requirements."	2	20%

**Question 5a.** *What measures do you think could improve the inclusion of PwD in the labor market?*

In analyzing the responses regarding potential measures to improve the inclusion of PwD in the labor market, the increase in physical accessibility and better working conditions stand out, as they can remove barriers related to physical access. In addition, the report emphasizes the importance of providing psychological support and counseling, both for the organizational environment and for PwD, as well as concrete measures to raise awareness and provide information about disability within organizations. The focus is on creating an organizational environment where PwD feel understood, supported, and encouraged. At the same time, employers have also emphasized the importance of financial and administrative measures to motivate organizations to adopt inclusive practices and cultures.

Through a secondary question to this (*Are you familiar with the tax facilities and government support for employing PwD? If so, do you consider them sufficient?*) it was highlighted that the degree of familiarity with tax facilities and government support among employers is variable, accompanied by opinions regarding their insufficiency, the need to simplify bureaucracy, and the need for additional measures such as professional training and tax reductions (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Answers to Question 5a. *What measures do you think could improve the inclusion of PwD in the labor market?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Measures related to accessibility and facilities	"Greater openness to remote work, improving aspects related to their transportation to/from the office, facilities specific to people with disabilities (desks, ramps, elevators...)." "Perhaps a job fair dedicated to this category of people."	3	30%
Support and counseling	"Psychological counseling within the professional environment." "Better information, increased attention to their needs, and more confidence in their abilities."	3	30%
Information and awareness	"Correct information, employee awareness, well-organized leadership." "Creating an inclusive work environment and providing continuous support for them."	2	20%
Financial and administrative measures	"Providing real benefits, not tax exemptions. Additional facilities related to CSR and public procurement... " "Financial aid/discounts for companies."	2	20%

**Question 6a.** *What type of support would be necessary to facilitate the employment of PwD?*

With regard to support measures designed to facilitate the employment of PwD, employers reported the following three main areas: specialized consulting for organizations, training, and financial support. Consultancy is seen as necessary for employers, as they need support regarding how adaptation processes should be carried out. Training programs play a significant role in equipping employers with knowledge about disability in the workplace and strategies for creating an inclusive culture. Finally, employers note that financial support is an important motivator for organizations, as additional resources may be needed to accommodate disabilities within the workplace (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Answers to Question 6a. *What type of support would be necessary to facilitate the employment of PwD?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Consultancy	"Consultancy." "Support for people with disabilities: access to recruitment platforms. For employers: support in adapting spaces for people with disabilities. "	4	40%
Training	"Training, adaptation period, training for existing employees to make the hiring and retention of a person with disabilities easier." "Training. " "Familiarization visits, spending more time with them to better understand their needs."	4	40%
Financial support	"Financial support, consultancy, not sanctioning." "Financial support."	2	20%

Regarding the types of roles within an organization that PwD could fill from the employers' perspective, employers mention placing PwD in administrative or office positions, particularly those that do not require prolonged physical exertion or frequent travel. However, positions requiring specific skills in sectors such as marketing, accounting, or customer service are also outlined, and companies have indicated that they are willing to include PwD in a variety of departments depending on the candidates' abilities and the type of disability.

### **PwD's perspectives**

**Question 1b.** *What are the main difficulties you have encountered in searching for and securing a job?*

Among the difficulties encountered in finding a job, the most commonly cited issues are discrimination and a lack of accommodation by employers. These issues are reflected in immediate negative reactions when employers learn about a candidate's disability, leading to an indirect rejection or the termination of communication and the recruitment process. Another important aspect is social reluctance toward medical conditions, where disability is perceived more as a vulnerability than as a manageable condition in a professional context. Participants noted employers' fears about potential medical emergencies or frequent absences. At the same time, the lack of accessibility and concrete support in the inclusion process is mentioned, both in terms of physical infrastructure and attitudes within the team. One participant also mentioned receiving help from a foundation to find a job (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Answers to Question 1b. *What are the main difficulties you have encountered in searching for and securing a job?*

<b>Theme/Category</b>	<b>Answers (examples)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Discrimination, prejudices, and distrust from employers	"All the bosses would change their tone when they heard I was in a wheelchair..." "The most common response was that they would call me back, but none of them did." "They would hang up on me or say they would call me back when they found out I was in a wheelchair... they are afraid I won't be able to handle the tools of the trade..."	3	30%
Social reluctance/fears related to medical conditions or disabilities	"The main difficulties were caused by my disability." "In general, people are reluctant to hire someone with medical issues who could have emergencies at any time."	2	20%
The lack of accessibility and real support in the inclusion process	"The only solution was to work for a few months for free to prove to them that I do my job like a professional." "Some find it difficult to work or coexist with people with disabilities." "The challenges are mainly related to accessibility and commuting to work."	3	30%

**Question 2b.** *Have you ever encountered prejudice or discrimination from employers or coworkers? If so, please briefly share an experience.*

Discrimination, marginalization, and avoidance by employers and coworkers constitute several ongoing barriers PwD face when attempting to enter the labor market, according to the analysis of responses. Despite their professional qualifications, participants described circumstances in which disability was a direct reason for exclusion, demonstrating

persistent discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. However, several individuals reported experiencing more covert forms of exclusion, such as social isolation at work and a lack of confidence in their abilities from management or colleagues. These perceptions and behaviors reflect an organizational culture that, in many cases, is not prepared for authentic inclusion and is influenced by stereotypes and a lack of information. One participant also mentions that when they worked from home, they did not experience these attitudinal barriers (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Answers to Question 2b. *Have you ever encountered prejudice or discrimination from employers or coworkers? If so, please briefly share an experience.*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Experiences of marginalization and isolation	"Yes, many times. They marginalize me." "There have been situations of marginalization or isolation."	2	30%
Disability-related discrimination	"I was told that I am good for the position, but they cannot hire me because of my disability." "Yes, in the company, a competition was held for the positions that remained after the restructuring, and my application was not accepted because I am a person with a disability."	3	37.5%
The negative perception regarding abilities and availability	"Yes, I speak more slowly, I have generalized dystonia, I do not shy away from work, and I do not like to be pitied. They should not be hesitant anymore." "Not necessarily. Just the reluctance and, in general, it seemed to be related to the fact that there might be situations when I can't be available, not the problems I have."	3	37.5%

**Question 3b.** *What do you consider to be the necessary adaptations or adjustments to work efficiently in a job?*

Among the participants' proposals regarding necessary adaptations and adjustments in the workplace, the need for an inclusive work environment stands out, in which PwD are treated with trust and respect, free from prejudice, and where emotional support and an open organizational culture are emphasized. In practical terms, physical adaptations to workspaces are proposed, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, to ensure physical access and autonomy in the workplace. At the same time, participants believe that flexible schedules and remote work can accommodate various individual needs, especially for those with physical functioning limitations, as well as the implementation of professional training and retraining programs, especially for individuals who have lost their ability to work in a certain field (Table 10).

**Table 10.** Answers to Question 3b. *What do you consider to be the necessary adaptations or adjustments to work efficiently in a job?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
----------------	--------------------	---	---

Creating an inclusive work environment	"Eliminating discrimination and marginalization, increasing confidence and self-esteem, encouragement, and inclusion." "Employers should not be hesitant when they see us, because they don't know that we are capable and do our job very well."	2	25%
Physical adaptations and infrastructure	"Ramp, elevator, adapted toilet." "Any job should be adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities."	2	25%
Flexibility of schedule and remote work options	"Considering that I don't have visible issues that would prevent me from having an office job, I believe that only schedule flexibility and the possibility of working from home."	2	25%
Professional training and skill development	"Authorities should support professional training and retraining." "Acquiring a physical disability should not be the end of one's professional activity." "Acquiring a physical disability should not be the end of one's professional activity."	2	25%

**Question 4b.** *Reflecting on your entire work experience, what were the moments when you received support from your employer or authorities for your integration into the workforce?*

The most frequently described situation is marked by the absence of support from both employers and authorities, leading to a professional journey characterized by individual effort and a lack of institutional support mechanisms. For other participants, support was present but occasional or conditional, offered depending on the openness of certain individuals in the environment rather than as a result of a clear organizational policy, and was perceived as isolated, limited, and unevenly distributed. At the same time, though in a smaller number of cases, there are examples of constant and effective support, especially from current employers, with respondents mentioning recognition, trust, and adaptation to their needs (Table 11).

**Table 11.** Answers to Question 4b. *Reflecting on your entire work experience, what were the moments when you received support from your employer or authorities for your integration into the workforce?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Lack of support	"There weren't really any moments like these. I had to fight on my own." "The authorities didn't lift a finger." "I didn't feel supported in any way."	4	50%
Occasional or conditional support (more individual than systematic)	"When I found people willing to help." "The employer preferred that I work from home..."	2	25%
Real support from current employers	"In my current job, absolutely every time I needed it." "My bosses were very satisfied, and I even got promoted."	2	25%

**Question 5b.** *What kind of support would be useful to facilitate employment and integration into the labor market?*

Participants identified three main forms of support necessary for facilitating employment and integration into the labor market. On the one hand, the importance of emotional support and social validation is highlighted by encouragement, trust, and acceptance, which help maintain motivation and self-confidence. On the other hand, the need for clear institutional interventions is emerging through policies, laws, and the genuine involvement of authorities in supporting the employment of PwD. Specific support measures, such as specialized platforms or resources designed to assist people in finding suitable jobs, are also suggested at the same time, demonstrating the necessity for useful tools tailored to the actual labor market environment (Table 12).

**Table 12.** Answers to Question 5b. *What kind of support would be useful to facilitate employment and integration into the labor market?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Emotional support and social validation	"Encouragement, trust, inclusion." "People should not discourage someone who is trying." "Moral and emotional support."	3	37.5%
Institutional support and systemic interventions (laws, policies)	"I believe the most important support should come from the state..." "A law should be enacted and respected." "The involvement of competent authorities to... insist on employment."	3	37.5%
Practical tools and direct mediation in the labor market	"A page with jobs for people with disabilities." "Maybe a person to help identify suitable job opportunities..."	2	25%

**Question 6b.** *What two pieces of advice would you give to a young PwD who is looking for a job?*

The most common recommendation related to perseverance and individual autonomy, stressing the value of self-assurance, tolerance, and determination in conquering challenges as well as a strong stance in the face of prejudice. Furthermore, the importance of education and skill development in enhancing competitiveness in the labor market is stressed. Simultaneously, some participants offered suggestions marked by caution and awareness of systemic constraints, proposing a practical, knowledgeable approach that integrates an understanding of legal rights with the contemporary socio-professional environment (Table 13).

**Table 13.** Answers to Question 6b. *What two pieces of advice would you give to a young PwD who is looking for a job?*

Theme/Category	Answers (examples)	N	%
Perseverance and personal autonomy	"Do not give up, keep trying until you succeed." "Seriousness and persistence, with a lot of patience, everything can be resolved." "To have confidence in himself and not to let himself be discriminated against."	4	50%
Investment in education and skill	"To learn constantly, the key lies in adaptation." "Skill enhancement. One needs to be as competitive"	2	25%

development		as possible in the job market. "		
Caution	and	"He should give up; if he does not have connections	2	25%
awareness	of	or does not pay bribes, he has no chance."		
systemic realities		"To inquire about the rights of people with disabilities."		

## Discussion

The present study explored the opportunities and barriers to the employment of PwD in Romania from the perspectives of both employers and PwD using a qualitative approach. Qualitative data analysis suggests that, despite recognition of the importance of labor market inclusion, the implementation of inclusive practices within organizations is hindered by multiple institutional, social, and cultural barriers (Barnes & Mercer, 2005). An important contribution of this study lies in the detailed exploration of barriers and opportunities for inclusion at the practical level, beyond general declarations, from the perspective of both PwD and employers, intending to understand the factors that make this process inconsistent and difficult to achieve, but also which factors could facilitate higher employment and retention rates.

Regarding barriers, employers reported difficulties related to a lack of support and consultative structures in the inclusion process, a lack of training on disability-inclusion strategies within the organization, and misconceptions about the actual need for accommodations. In this regard, our results suggest that in the absence of information and training opportunities regarding disability, as well as practical support, employers' misconceptions about the inclusion of PwD may continue to influence organizational behavior (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012). Employers might overlook the potential of PwD by selecting applicants based on standard criteria that do not consider specific needs. This idea is also supported by Schloemer-Jarvis et al. (2022), who suggest that a lack of training among human resources staff can lead to systematic exclusion, even in organizations that claim to be inclusive. Furthermore, both groups of participants reported a lack of physical, organizational, and relational accessibility in the workplace. Employers mentioned a number of difficulties in adapting workspaces, including infrastructure (e.g., ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms) and challenges related to the nature of the work, particularly in fields that require physical labor or shift work. Previous literature suggests that these difficulties are cited as reasons organizations avoid hiring PwD; however, it notes that these adaptations are often either free or low-cost, and that the long-term benefits are significant (Domzal et al., 2008; Schur et al., 2005).

Another central barrier to employment inclusion is attitudinal barriers, such as prejudices, stereotypes, and a rigid organizational culture, a fact reported by both employers and PwD. As Lindsay et al. (2019) emphasize, even in organizations that declare an inclusion policy, PwD may encounter subtle exclusion, lack of promotion, or difficulties in social interactions. Negative attitudes of colleagues or superiors can create a hostile work environment, influencing performance, well-being, and the decision to remain in the organization (Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall, 2014). PwD who participated in this study frequently described experiences of direct or indirect discrimination, correlated with the lack of accessibility, both physical and informational or relational. While the European Strategy for the Rights of People with Disabilities 2021–2030 and the Romanian Law 448/2006 encourage appropriate accommodations, their implementation is inconsistent and sometimes relies on individual initiatives rather than on robust institutional procedures. Therefore, in the absence of well-monitored regulations, the employment of PwD relies on the transparency and social consciousness of specific companies or organizations.

At the same time, employers discuss their own challenges in finding qualified applicants, the lack of designated channels for recruiting, and uncertainty about available facilities and the legal environment. Although Romanian law allows tax deductions and hiring quotas, most companies claim that the bureaucracy either discourages them or provides inadequate information. Therefore, the capacity for public policy implementation is greatly diminished by the absence of efficient consultation and support systems, and legal measures frequently turn out to be more punitive than stimulative (World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, it might be difficult to decide whether to disclose a disability during the employment process. Previous research indicates that non-disclosure is prevalent among people with "invisible" disabilities and is impacted by the fear of rejection or stigma. (Santuzzi et al., 2014), while employers and PwD who reported changes in attitude or rejection from companies when mentioning their disability have both highlighted this point. MacDonald-Wilson et al. (2011) emphasize that organizations that foster a safe environment for disclosure generally implement more effective inclusion policies. In the absence of this psychological safety climate, a self-imposed isolation effect occurs, negatively affecting both the employee and the organization.

However, our findings also highlighted a series of opportunities in the employment inclusion of PwD. Employers who have previously worked with PwD indicated an increased willingness to provide support systems, adapt employment opportunities, and promote collaborative work. Previous research, which shows that direct contact with diversity considerably decreases attitudinal barriers and encourages active inclusion, supports this finding (Copeland et al., 2010). According to Shier et al. (2009) and Vornholt et al. (2013), the effectiveness of inclusion also depends on the existence of corporate social responsibility policies, an inclusive vision, and diversity-sensitive leadership.

Another important finding is that employers and PwD also emphasized the perceived need for vocational counseling and psychological assistance. The inclusion process could potentially be significantly facilitated by mediation and counseling programs, particularly when combined with specialized training for managers and coworkers (Gewurtz et al., 2016; Hunt & Hunt, 2004). Furthermore, from the standpoint of human capital theory (Becker, 1983), effective inclusion into the labor market requires investments in education, ongoing professional training, and experience. In order to ensure that PwD maximizes their potential in accordance with market expectations, this idea promotes the necessity of professional retraining programs, tailored support, and vocational counseling. Employers and people with impairments both stressed this point and recommended focusing on the ongoing development of professional skills.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

The findings of this study highlight significant theoretical and practical implications that could inform cogent interventions at the institutional, professional, educational, and organizational levels. From a theoretical standpoint, the research reinforces the assumption that disability is a phenomenon that can only be understood when it interacts with the social and professional environment, rather than being understood in isolation as an individual trait (Imrie & Thomas, 2008). This viewpoint can be observed from the experiences of the participants, who emphasized not just tangible hurdles but also imperceptible ones, such as a lack of institutional support, a lack of confidence, or a misinterpretation of certain requirements. Therefore, the study presents an important argument for a relational and contextual approach to inclusion, emphasizing the environment's collective capacity to respond to diversity.

From a practical standpoint, there are several implications across three main areas: organizational change, training, and education. The findings suggest that the way disabilities are handled in schools and higher institutions has to be addressed. Participants underline the significance of early introduction of curriculum addressing diversity, human rights, and fair access to opportunities, arguing that ignorance and biases have deep roots and are frequently sustained by the school system. Recognizing the worth of every individual and fostering an environment that celebrates diversity are just as important to inclusive education as being physically present in the classroom. Regarding vocational training, on one hand, PwD express the need for support in acquiring professional skills tailored to the modern workplace, such as technology use, remote work, or teamwork interaction, emphasizing that career counseling, ongoing training, and access to easily accessible educational resources are crucial prerequisites for genuine and long-term participation in the labor market. On the other hand, employers might also benefit from training, not only on the legal or logistical aspects of hiring a PwD, but especially on changing their mindset. Employer participants who lacked relevant prior experience expressed uncertainty, fear, or erroneous assumptions, indicating the need for dedicated training programs to build an inclusive organizational culture. At the organizational level, the study's implications aim to restructure internal policies and practices to create a framework in which inclusion does not depend on individual goodwill but is an integral part of the organization's functioning. Employers need to revise their recruitment strategies, offer flexible work options, develop clear communication and support channels, and actively include PwD at all stages of decision-making. Inclusion is not just about access to a space, but about the opportunity to participate, contribute, and evolve professionally in a fair manner.

### **Limitations and future directions**

This study offers valuable insights into the employment inclusion process for PwD in the Romanian context, but several important limitations should be noted. Firstly, the use of a qualitative method and a relatively small sample of participants limits the possibility of generalizing the results to the broader Romanian socio-economic context. Participants were selected based on availability and access to the digital environment, which may introduce selection bias, favoring the voices of those with higher levels of education, autonomy, or social connectivity. Additionally, some types of disabilities were underrepresented, particularly intellectual or neurodevelopmental disabilities, which involve inclusion characteristics that have been insufficiently explored at this stage of the research. Future studies may consider expanding the research to a larger and more diverse group of participants.

Another limiting factor was the lack of direct face-to-face interaction, which limited the opportunity to explore participants' responses in depth. To gain a more nuanced understanding, future research could include interviews or focus groups. Additionally, although thematic analysis provided a structured framework for identifying patterns in participants' responses, qualitative research inevitably involves a certain degree of subjectivity. To enhance the validity of future conclusions, using mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative data would be beneficial. A future direction could also be the conduct of comparative studies across different economic sectors (public/private, production/services, small/large enterprises) that analyze how organizational culture, type of activity, or available resources influence openness to inclusion. Similarly, a comparative geographical analysis of urban and rural regions, or of counties with different levels of economic development, would help identify territorial inequalities in access to employment for PwD.

## Conclusion

This study provided a thorough examination of the various realities underlying the employment inclusion of PwD, combining their perspectives with those of employers. The findings indicated a pronounced disparity between the claimed commitments to equal opportunities and the real barriers encountered in the field, ranging from inadequate infrastructure to enduring biases and a lack of effective support systems. The study revealed that the process of employment inclusion encompasses more than just holding employment status; it also entails active engagement, acknowledgment, support, and genuine opportunities for advancement. PwD aspire to work, contribute, be helpful, and have respectable careers. However, several employers suggest that inclusion is not only feasible but also advantageous for the company as a whole when there is willingness, openness, and adequate support. At the same time, the study illustrated the interconnectedness of the barriers encountered and the need for effective solutions across organizational, legislative, educational, and cultural levels. A reactive or fragmented strategy is insufficient. A paradigm shift is required so that inclusion becomes an inherent, structural part of our understanding of work, collaboration, and each individual's contributions. A society is more cohesive, healthier, and better equipped to face future problems when all its members are given the chance to engage in professional life in a genuine and equal way.

## References

- Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2005). Disability, work, and welfare: Challenging the social exclusion of disabled people. *Work, Employment and Society*, 19(3), 527–545. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017005055669>
- Becker, G. S. (1983). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education* (2nd ed). Midway reprint.
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2011). *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (3. ed., substantially revised and expanded). Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Colella, A. J., & Bruyère, S. M. (2011). Disability and employment: New directions for industrial and organizational psychology. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA handbook of industrial and organizational psychology, Vol 1: Building and developing the organization*. (pp. 473–503). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/12169-015>
- Collier, D. (2016). *Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Workplace*. Cornell University.
- Copeland, J., Chan, F., Bezyak, J., & Fraser, R. T. (2010). Assessing Cognitive and Affective Reactions of Employers Toward People with Disabilities in the Workplace. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 20(4), 427–434. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-009-9207-y>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed). Sage publ.
- Domzal, C., Houtenville, A., & Sharma, R. (2008). *Survey of Employer Perspectives on the Employment of People with Disabilities: Technical Report*. United States Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy.
- Florian, L. (2014). What counts as evidence of inclusive education? *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 29(3), 286–294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.933551>

- Gewurtz, R. E., Langan, S., & Shand, D. (2016). Hiring people with disabilities: A scoping review. *Work*, 54(1), 135–148. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-162265>
- Goodley, D. (2017). Dis/entangling Critical Disability Studies. In A. Waldschmidt, H. Berressem, & M. Ingwersen (Eds.), *Culture—Theory—Disability* (pp. 81–110). transcript Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839425336-008>
- Houtenville, A., & Kalargyrou, V. (2012). People with Disabilities: Employers' Perspectives on Recruitment Practices, Strategies, and Challenges in Leisure and Hospitality. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 53(1), 40–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965511424151>
- Hunt, C. S., & Hunt, B. (2004). Changing Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities: Experimenting with an Educational Intervention. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 16(2), 266–280. JSTOR.
- Imrie, R., & Thomas, H. (2008). The interrelationships between environment and disability. *Local Environment*, 13(6), 477–483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549830802259748>
- Kulkarni, M., & Lengnick-Hall, M. L. (2014). Obstacles to Success in the Workplace for People With Disabilities: A Review and Research Agenda. *Human Resource Development Review*, 13(2), 158–180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484313485229>
- Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Leck, J., Shen, W., & Stinson, J. (2019). Disability disclosure and workplace accommodations among youth with disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 41(16), 1914–1924.
- MacDonald-Wilson, K. L., Russinova, Z., Rogers, E. S., Lin, C. H., Ferguson, T., Dong, S., & MacDonald, M. K. (2011). Disclosure of Mental Health Disabilities in the Workplace. In I. Z. Schultz & E. S. Rogers (Eds.), *Work Accommodation and Retention in Mental Health* (pp. 191–217). Springer New York. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0428-7\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0428-7_10)
- Mohapatra, S., Maiya, G. A., Nayak, U. U., Benny, L., Watson, J., Kinjawadekar, A., & Nandineni, R. D. (2024). Centering Social Justice and Equity in Research on Accessibility to Public Buildings for Individuals with Mobility Disabilities: A scoping review. *F1000Research*, 13, 930. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.153797.2>
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1609406917733847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Oliver, M. (1990). *The Politics of Disablement*. Macmillan Education UK. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20895-1>
- Pachița, I.-C. (2024). Repere ale moralității în practicile organizaționale: Cazul persoanelor cu nevoi speciale. In C. Măirean & A. Maftai (Eds.), *Psihologia moralității. Repere teoretice și implicații practice în condiții adverse de viață* (pp. 312–324). Polirom.
- Retief, M., & Letšosa, R. (2018). Models of disability: A brief overview. *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 74(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4738>
- Rimmerman, A. (2013). *Social inclusion of people with disabilities: National and international perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2. ed). Sage Publications.
- Sampana, E. Y., & De la cruz, A. B. (2020). Count them in! Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in a Diversified Workforce: A Transformative Mixed-Method Study. *Journal of Management and Training for Industries*, 7(2), 26–60. <https://doi.org/10.12792/JMTI.7.2.26>

- Santuzzi, A. M., Waltz, P. R., Finkelstein, L. M., & Rupp, D. E. (2014). Invisible Disabilities: Unique Challenges for Employees and Organizations. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 7(2), 204–219. <https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12134>
- Schloemer-Jarvis, A., Bader, B., & Böhm, S. A. (2022). The role of human resource practices for including persons with disabilities in the workforce: A systematic literature review. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(1), 45–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1996433>
- Schur, L., Kruse, D., & Blanck, P. (2005). Corporate culture and the employment of persons with disabilities. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 23(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.624>
- Shier, M., Graham, J. R., & Jones, M. E. (2009). Barriers to employment as experienced by disabled people: A qualitative analysis in Calgary and Regina, Canada. *Disability & Society*, 24(1), 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590802535485>
- Swain, J. (Ed.). (2004). *Disabling barriers—Enabling environments* (2nd ed). Sage Publications.
- Verdugo, M. A., Martín-Ingelmo, R., Jordán De Urríes, F. B., Vicent, C., & Sánchez, M. C. (2009). Impact on quality of life and self-determination of a national program for increasing supported employment in Europe. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 31(1), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-2009-0473>
- Verulava, T., & Bedianashvili, G. (2021). Work Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities: Employers' Perspectives. *Quality - Access to Success*, 22, 159–163.
- Vornholt, K., Uitdewilligen, S., & Nijhuis, F. J. N. (2013). Factors Affecting the Acceptance of People with Disabilities at Work: A Literature Review. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 23(4), 463–475. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-013-9426-0>
- World Bank. (2021). *Diagnoza situației persoanelor cu dizabilități în România*. World Bank Group.
- World Health Organization, & The World Bank. (2011). *World report on disability*.