



## CONFERENCE REPORT



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OSVIT

Under the auspices of Prof. Dr. Mirando Mrsić, Minister of Labour and Pension Systems  
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## Rationale

The right to work in an open, inclusive environment is a fundamental right that is recognised through several international legal instruments. Open employment is essential for a person's social integration, physical and mental health, well-being and self-realisation. Additionally, having the opportunity to obtain a job that is freely chosen and accepted with fair wages and working conditions allows a person to contribute to society and earn a living.

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities outlines the rights of persons with a disability seeking employment by stating that "States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to have the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities." It is clear that Article 27 not only recognises, but emphasizes that persons with a disability should enjoy the same rights as others. These rights include the right to gain a living by work, freely chosen or accepted in a labour market that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

By bringing together, policy makers, employers, social service providers and self-advocates, the overall objective of the conference was to illustrate how both employers and employees with disabilities can benefit from a more accessible and diverse labour market through the exchange of ideas and practices. Furthermore, it was the goal of this conference to remove barriers and raise employment opportunities for persons with a disability throughout Europe.



## Content

The 'Persons with Disabilities in Employment: Inclusion through Jobs – Making it Real' conference took place in Zadar, Croatia on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of May. The event was organised by the European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (EASPD) in collaboration with OSVIT, with the financial support of the European Commission. The conference was attended by almost 300 participants from across Europe, which included persons with disabilities, policy makers, employers, service providers for persons with disabilities and many others. Languages spoken during the event were English, Croatian and German, which additionally were translated into sign language.

## Welcome Session – Setting the Scene

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The introduction session of the conference was opened Josip Drzaic, the President of OSVIT, followed by Franz Wolfmayr, President of EASPD, Ms. Lidija Hrastić Novak, the Director of Institute for Disability Certification, Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disability, with IDCPREPD, Tatjana Dalić a representative from Croatia and concluded with a video message from Marianne Thyssen, the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

The key messages from the welcome session that would serve as a foundation for the remainder of the conference were:

- ★ The EU has competences, especially in employment, which means that the services that are provided, are provided in two different ways; to the people themselves in order to find work and to enterprises in order to provide opportunities and conditions to support employment;
- ★ It is important to present positive examples because it can serve as a framework and motivation in implementing practices around the EU. Examples of good practices cannot literally be copied to other environments but instead can be adapted to best suit the local situation;
- ★ Jobs should be open to all citizens so that they may be able to contribute to all levels of society. Employers should be obligated to adapt their conditions to facilitate work for persons with a disability;

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Message from Marianne Thyssen, the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

*Employment is indeed a top priority for Europe, but so too is inclusion. The European Commission is working with Member States and service providers to ensure a more efficient use of funds and to create better jobs for a more inclusive society.*

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## Award Celebration



In an effort to not only exchange ideas during the conference but to also recognise successful and innovative practices in employment of persons with a disability, the conference celebrated the second instalment of the *EASPD Employment for All Award*. The ten award finalists had the opportunity to briefly present their practice to the conference participants. The main messages from the finalists were:

- ★ Practices should involve a person centred approach to help persons with a disability transition into employment;
- ★ Involving parents, teachers and careers in gaining situational awareness is key;
- ★ The business world plays a large role in being responsible for employing persons with a disability;
- ★ Persons with a disability should be employed on the open labour market where they have the opportunity to interact in an open society.

Elite Supported Employment Agency from the Social Services/Support Provider category and La Fageda from the Business/Employer category were named as the two winners of the EASPD Employment for All Award.

## Plenary Session 1: People with Disabilities and Employment

Moderated by Mr. Malden Ili kovi , an editor and journalist with HRT, Croatia, the first plenary session focused on employing persons with a disability. More specifically, this session presented the EASPD Employment Deceleration as well as examined the spectrum of employment for disabled people and various activation measures along with step by step support methods for employment of persons with a disability in the open labour market as told by experiences from France and Austria. Robert Anderson from EURO-FOUND began by giving an overview of the employment sector in Europe as a whole, and was followed by self-advocates, members from DPO's and employers. The main messages from the first plenary session were:

- ★ Job opportunities vary amongst many European Member States. Sharing these opportunities is important and can serve as an inspiration to us all. Additionally, not only should real job opportunities exist for all, but it is also crucial that these opportunities are recognised by all;
- ★ Activation into the labour market takes place at the intersection of employment policy and other social services such as education, health care and social protection. Many member states have begun to implement active inclusion measures. However, careful attention must be paid to the sustainability of these activation policies;
- ★ There is a need for joint action and coordination when it comes to employing persons with a disability. This means local authorities, social partners, public employment services and NGO's must work together to implement active inclusion measures. Yet, amongst many Member States policy priorities vary widely;
- ★ Lessons learned from successful case studies include, the importance of an integrated approach, training and job placement for persons with a disability, rapid placement into a job after training, quality services, and employer support.

## Workshops



Seven round table workshops were organised with the goal of sharing and discussing best practices through seven job sectors/areas; white collar, ICT, industrial, creative arts, agricultural and gardening, hotel and catering, social, vocational training to employment. Testimonies from employers as well as employees and trainees were given during the session providing reflection on innovative ideas on employment where all participants had the opportunity to take part in an interactive atmosphere. The key elements derived from the workshops were:

### *Job training and Qualification – Franchise*

- ★ During the ideal traineeships, the trainees should receive both specific job-related training as well as social skills training with the help of employees, job-trainers and counsellors along with proper compensation. Key elements leading to the success of job training programs is the importance of well-developed, transferable and profitable business-models.

### *Bridging the Gap: Innovative ways to link employers and employees*

- ★ Both employers and employees must work together to provide a personalised link that is tailored to the specific needs of the beneficiary.

### *Employment in the Agriculture Sector*

- ★ Persons with a learning disability can create real value in the agriculture sector due to the manual aspect of the job.

### *Quality Competitiveness and Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities: Creative solutions based on the product quality as unique selling points*

- ★ Promising practices should be in the open labour market where there are individualised pathways but while at the same time remaining applicable to different kind of disabilities. The quality of a product is paramount in the success of a programme.

### *Supported Employment and Skills Development: Person centred Approach*

- ★ A person centred approach should 'start with a person and end with a job.' Programmes should play to the strengths of the individual and should promote independence at a person centred pace.

### *Employment in the Creative Industry*

- ★ In the creative industry, service providers should act as mediators between the artists and the market in order to increase self-esteem and create more motivation for persons with a disability in the creative industry.

### *Sheltered Employment in an Open Society: A different perspective*

- ★ Practices should not only involve NGO's and public authorities but should also include businesses and companies. Additionally it's essential that well trained professionals in both the public and private sector provide both social and psychological support to persons with a disability when they seek employment.

### *The ICT Sector: PCT/AT and accessibility at work*

- ★ It is important to raise awareness of technology and accessibility at work and to include the dimension of dignity in the creation of assistive devices. Devices that are designed must be universally designed in addition to being affordable for the end user.

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*"Every presentation should have a case study and an example of what can and has been done."*

**Branimi Šutalo, Advisor to the Mayor of Zagreb**

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## Theatre Performances

Throughout the conference, the Suisha Inclusive Arts group from Ireland performed theatrical sketches on challenges that persons with a disability face in the workplace. The first sketch titled "Setting the Scene: If we cannot get past the first step, how do we make it real," reflected upon the physical and stereotypical barriers that someone with a disability might face when attending a meeting or/presentation. The second sketch were observations taken from a real life situation in which an employee with autism waited on tables with the support from staff and was met with uneasiness from customers. Lastly, the group presented a video on the experiences of a member of their group in which she was employed through a training programme at a hair salon. When she approached her boss about being compensated for her work, she was let go from her duties at the salon. The arts group showed through their sketches that:



- ★ Places of employment can be at times inaccessible for a person with disabilities;
- ★ Everybody is entitled to work even if minor adjustments need to be made at the place of employment;
- ★ Persons with a disability are entitled to the same fair wages in an open labour market.

## Conclusions from Day 1

The main conclusions from day 1 were:

- ★ A person with disabilities, should have the opportunity to choose employment on the open labour market, in an environment that is freely chosen and freely accepted;
- ★ An integrated approach should involve local authorities, social partners, public employment services and NGO's;
- ★ Employers should place an emphasis on the job seeker through person to person interactions (person centred approach) ;
- ★ The link with employers needs to be improved. This can be done through, awareness raising, simplified approaches to employment, training for employers and specialized job training for persons with a disability;

## Plenary Session 2: Employers and the Work Place

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The second day of the conference opened with the second plenary session titled "Employers and the Workplace." Moderated by Robert Elston, Vice-President of the European Union of Supported Employment, this session focused on the aspects of new employment models and new trends in Europe, along with methodologies of success in the open labour market, ICT/PCT in the workplace, Corporate Social Responsibility and employment for autistic people through social enterprises. The main messages from this session were:

- ★ The impact of the financial crisis has directly affected persons with a disability and employment. In order to mitigate this negative impact, States must offer incentives to companies who employ persons with a disability and create special offers destined for sheltered workshops, encourage persons with a disability to seek employment, and create a system of government guarantees;
- ★ People must be employable, in order for this to happen it is necessary to guarantee that persons with a disability have access to education that will allow them to enter the open labour market;
- ★ The word 'disabled' should be eliminated from an employer's vocabulary when they talk about employing persons with a disability. Persons with a disability should be judged based on their CV and merits and not their disability. The role of service providers is to learn how to sell their services to employers because many employers do not want to change the system;



*"Employment is a fundamental human right and should be treated as such, but cuts in welfare policy as the result of the economic recession affecting European countries, have a negative impact on the actions and projects aimed at facilitating the employment status for persons with disabilities"*

Dimitrios Nikolsky, Chair of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Rights of People with Disabilities

## Plenary Session 3: Leading by Example

Plenary session three, moderated by Fabrizio Fea, Medical Director of the Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Disabilities, brought together, politicians, a self-advocate, and members from DPO's to discuss their experiences in the field of employing persons with a disability. Discussion topics included employment in the public, private and social sectors, along with a discussion on effective partnerships especially at the Croatia level. The main messages from this session include:



- ★ As experienced by the city of Zagreb, when it comes to employing persons with a disability, it is essential to include full integration, equal participation and equality in education, employment and healthcare. A committee of experts is responsible for ensuring the goals of increasing the professional capacities of persons with a disability and raising the awareness of persons with a disability throughout the city are met;

- ★ In seeking employment in an open labour market, an informal network is essential. However, often times, persons with a disability live with a social stigma which prevents them from creating such a network. These social stigmas must be eliminated in order for persons with a disability to have the opportunity to create social networks;
- ★ Many barriers to entry into the open labour market begin during the early years of life. Problems first begin at home, where often times the parents are inexperienced on how to raise a child with a disability. The social welfare system does not provide enough support to a parent, and often times there are no workshops or trainings that give parents the necessary tools to care for a child with a disability. Not only are many parents unprepared, by so too are teachers. Children with a disability should have the opportunity to take an active role in education through integration with all students;
- ★ Despite quotas that set standards on employing persons with a disability, often times companies find a way around these quotas. Red tape must be reduced in that it would incentivize many companies to employ persons with a disability;
- ★ In many companies, the job coaching method is part of mainstream HR. This allows for a platform in which different kinds of organisations can have an open dialogue and an exchange of views.

## Active Discussion Forum and Conclusions



*"We must stop talking about disability and start talking about ability. If we are serious about the individual and their abilities, we have to look at how to support individuals"*

-Jim Crowe, EASPD Vice-President

The conference concluded with an active discussion forum moderated by Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General of EASPD. During this session, the EASPD Employment Declaration was discussed, along with the future and way forward for persons with a disability. Participants in this discussion included members from DPO's and also included Dimitrios Nikolsky, the Chair of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Following these discussions, the conference attendees had the opportunity to provide input on the conference and the topics discussed throughout the two days. The main discussion points discussed during the active forum were:

- ★ Article 27 of the UNCRPD ensures confirmation of the right to employment for persons with a disability through a decent job that is freely chosen through a real contract, with labour rights and a fair liveable wage;
- ★ The first step in social integration is strengthening employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The social economy plays a large role in accomplishing this first step in social integration. Additionally, public authorities have a huge responsibility in increasing the employment rate of persons with a disability, especially through providing support for both employers and employees. It is important that all relevant stakeholders should be included in discussing strategies on employing persons with a disability;

- ★ The drafting of the Employment Declaration is sound, however, it is the implementation of the declaration that is the most crucial and difficult step. The implementation is important because without it, the declaration is just a piece of paper and not a practice;
- ★ It is important that any job training helps the beneficiary live independently and discover the possibilities that arise from a job, which involves aspects such as education, vocational training, and job sampling and structural activities. Sheltered workshops should remain flexible accounting for those who leave the labour market temporarily but wish to re-enter the labour market;
- ★ Technology and ICT in the workplace should be accessible for persons with a disability as well as create a more accessible workplace environment for persons with a disability. Furthermore cost compensation of modifications for persons with a disability in the workplace should be sponsored at least in part by public authorities;
- ★ Often times, statistical data between EU member states is non-transferable, and thus is difficult to develop strategies based on such data. Additionally, much can be learned from the experiences of rural regions and their strategies on employing persons with a disability.
- ★ The message is clear, further government funding and structures of support for persons with a disability is needed in order to receive support and enable the social sector to create better perspectives in creating an easier transition from education to jobs. The gap between ending education and finding a job should be well managed and should be as short as possible. Providing quality education and early aid is crucial in tackling employment for persons with a disability. Additionally, the Youth Guarantee which in theory is supposed to guarantee the rights to employment for young adults is not 100% usable for persons with a disability.



#### EASPD calls upon European Institutions to:

- ★ Create an employment for persons with a disability action plan;
- ★ Foster knowledge Sharing;
- ★ Implement efficient and effective Stakeholder Platforms focusing on employment of persons with a disability;
- ★ Reform to the quota system for employing persons with a disability.

## Media coverage

The conference was covered by the Croatian national and local networks such as HRT (Croatian Radio Television), Nova TV and RTL TV. Throughout the conference, the press conducted interviews with several of the conference participants including EASPD Secretary General Luk Zelderloo. These interviews were used to gain a first-hand account of the conference proceedings, along with further explanations on many of the topics, and shown on HRT. Updates and interviews from the conference appeared on Croatian national as well as local news.





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