

I **COULDN'T WAIT** TO GET STARTED

Voices from Inclusive Workplaces in the Republic of Serbia



**Good practice
guide for the
employment of
persons with
disabilities**

Copyright © International Labour Organization 2019

First published 2019

Publications of the International Labour Office enjoy copyright under Protocol 2 of the Universal Copyright Convention. Nevertheless, short excerpts from them may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to ILO Publications (Rights and Licensing), International Labour Office, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland, or by email: rights@ilo.org. The International Labour Office welcomes such applications.

Libraries, institutions and other users registered with reproduction rights organizations may make copies in accordance with the licences issued to them for this purpose. Visit www.ifrro.org to find the reproduction rights organization in your country.

"I couldn't wait to get started" - Voice from inclusive workplaces in the Republic of Serbia

ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe, 2019

ISBN 9789220313985 (print)

ISBN 9789220313992 (web pdf)

Also available in Serbian: : *"I couldn't wait to get started" - Voice from inclusive workplaces in the Republic of Serbia*

ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe, 2019

ISBN 9789220314258 (print)

ISBN 9789220314265 (web pdf)

The designations employed in ILO publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the International Labour Office concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office of the opinions expressed in them.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the International Labour Office, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

Information on ILO publications and digital products can be found at: www.ilo.org/publns.

Printed in the Republic of Serbia

Cover photo and all interior photos © Srdjan Ilic

“I couldn’t wait to get started”

Voices from inclusive workplaces in the Republic of Serbia

Good practice guide for the employment of persons with disabilities

Belgrade, October 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Serbian Association of Employers would like to thank Tatiana Mamula Nikolic, the employers, employees and individuals who participated and contributed to this guide with their direct and indirect work, time, advice, recommendations and knowledge. This guide was completed under the supervision of Mariko Ouchi, Specialist on Working Conditions and Gender/Employment Equality, the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office

for Central and Eastern Europe (ILO-Budapest), with the assistance of Veronika Tomka, Jovan Protic, Thomas Bass, Srdjan Ilic and Hadley Kincade. Valuable comments provided by Esteban Tromel, Senior Disability Specialist, ILO Headquarters, Iulia Drumea, Senior Specialist, Employer's Activities, ILO-Budapest and Michael Andrei Szporluk, ILO expert, were incorporated into this publication.

ABBREVIATIONS

CRPD Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol

ERE Enterprise for Rehabilitation and Employment

ILO International Labour Organization

MBA Master in Business Administration

NES National Employment Service

NGO Non-governmental organization

RSD Serbian dinar

US\$ American dollar

PREFACE

This brochure was prepared by the Serbian Association of Employers and published with the assistance of the International Labour Organization (ILO), under the framework of the United Nations Partnership for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD project) entitled “Autonomy, Voice and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Serbia.” It is based on a joint action by five UN organizations in Serbia—the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)—to answer the most urgent questions concerning the rights, social and legal status of persons with disabilities in Serbia.

The joint UN action is strongly rooted within the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol (CRPD), the CRPD Committee’s recommendations to Serbia (2016) and the National Strategy on Disability (2017–2020). It also fully reflects and contributes to the achievement of the goals of the Development Partnership Framework for Serbia (2016–2020) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2030.

The purpose of this brochure is to support employers in the process of recruiting persons with disabilities. It briefs readers on Serbia’s legal framework, and four illustrative cases present the voices of persons with disabilities and their employers alike.

The guide is intended primarily for small and medium-size enterprises—numerous and often the least informed about their legal obligations—to use as a resource to help understand good practice in the implementation of these obligations. Large enterprises might find it useful as well, and the guide also is intended to support and inspire persons with disabilities during the job-seeking process.

We hope that readers will better understand the legal requirements and go the extra mile by adding value for their companies by hiring persons with disabilities. We also hope that this guide will provide sufficient information to persons with disabilities while looking for work. Most importantly, we wish that this guide will contribute to an inclusive society by focusing on the abilities of persons with disabilities as productive members of their local communities.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK CONCERNING THE RECRUITMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Employers' obligations towards all their employees are prescribed by the Republic of Serbia's *Labour Law*,¹ including detailed legislation on the hiring, rights and treatment of employees with disabilities. In addition, the prohibition of discrimination and rights of employed persons with disabilities is defined explicitly in the Labour Law.²

Persons with disabilities recruitment quota system

The *Law on professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities* defines a recruitment quota system for persons with disabilities. Employers of 20 to 49 employees are required to hire one person with disabilities, and employers need to hire one more disabled person for every additional 50 employees, in accordance with the quota system.³ If an employer does not comply, the law stipulates that a legal entity⁴ is liable to fines up to a maximum of 1,000,000 dinars (RSD) (US\$ 9,400) and an entrepreneur⁵ is liable to fines up to a maximum of RSD 400,000 (US\$ 3,700).

Employers with more than 20 employees may opt out by paying a monthly charge up to half of the average salary to a national fund for each unfilled position reserved for a disabled person within the quota system.⁶ The amount is not fixed and tracks increases of the average wage, adjusting on a monthly basis. In June 2019, it was around RSD 37,800

(US\$ 353). This government measure allows employers to choose between employing a person with disabilities or a contribution to the national budget for the professional rehabilitation and promotion of access to work for persons with disabilities. This fund is earmarked for employment incentives, professional rehabilitation, wages of persons with disabilities employed by enterprises for professional rehabilitation and for the employment of persons with disabilities in accordance with the law. Employers are also exempt from the obligation to employ persons with disabilities if they have signed a contract with an Enterprise for Rehabilitation and Employment (ERE),⁷ a company specialized in professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities.⁸ After signing a contract with an ERE, the employer affected by the quota pays an amount equivalent to 20 times the average monthly wage per each person with disabilities not employed, in line with the quota for the purchase of the goods and services made by the ERE over the next 12 months.

According to the Article 25 of the *Law on professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities* all newly-established companies are exempt from paying the fees foreseen by the quota system during the first 24 months since their establishment/registration by the Agency for Public Registries. This hides a potential hazard that a company owner might rename their company (by officially closing it

down and opening under a different name) and thus avoid paying the penalty foreseen by the quota.

The *Law on the prohibition of discrimination* prohibits employers from discriminating against persons with disabilities.⁹ This applies to all persons who are employed, regardless of the form of the contract under which they perform the work. The *Law on prevention of discrimination against persons with disabilities* regulates employers' rights and obligations through the prohibition of discriminatory behaviour, clearly defining what the law considers as such.¹⁰

Employers who employ persons with disabilities are entitled to receive certain incentives for recruitment. The *Law on professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities* defines various ways in which wages or other relevant costs are reimbursed to employers who provide support in the workplace and adjust the workplace to the needs of workers with disabilities.¹¹ The *Law on compulsory social security contributions* stipulates the periods of and conditions for exemptions of the employer from their obligation to pay compulsory social security contributions, another incentive for employers to employ persons with disabilities.¹²

Enterprise/Entrepreneur having more than 20 employees

How to meet recruitment quota for person(s) with disabilities

OPTION 1

Recruitment of person(s) with disabilities



OPTION 2

Paying a monthly charge
(as of June 2019)

50%
of average salary for each unfilled persons with disabilities quota

OPTION 3

Signing a contract with an ERE and paying

20
times the average monthly wage per each person with disabilities not employed

Non-fulfillment of the recruitment quota for person(s) with disabilities

Paying a fine
(as of June 2019)

Legal entity
up to 1 million dinars

Entrepreneur
up to 400,000 dinars

The 2019 National Employment Action Plan¹³ provides a range of employment subsidies for persons with disabilities, such as:

- Wage subsidies for persons with disabilities without work experience,
- Subsidies for employment of the long-term unemployed in newly created jobs.¹⁴

Employers who employ persons with disabilities are entitled, through the National Employment Service, to receive these subsidies under the laws already mentioned. Employers have the opportunity to participate in programmes aimed at persons with disabilities such as the Public Works Programme, the Professional Practice Programme or the Practical Knowledge Acquisition Programme. Employers who enrol in these programmes receive the funds provided by law, prescribed by the rules for each programme.

Research has shown that the gains from employing persons with disabilities for employers are much greater than the financial incentives provided by the state. According to employers who participated in the latest research on long-term employment of persons with disabilities published by the Youth with Disabilities Forum in cooperation with the National Employment Service,¹⁵ persons with disabilities are diligent and loyal, and often more dedicated to their work than other employees.

Employers emphasize the communication skills of persons with disabilities as one of their main strengths. They also feel that employing persons with disabilities contributes to the positive image of their companies,¹⁶ helping to develop a company's leadership and values.¹⁷



PRACTICAL INFORMATION ON THE RECRUITMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Recruiting persons with disabilities is not too different from hiring anyone else. The recruitment process consists of:

- Defining the required competencies and knowledge for the post
- Advertising vacancies
- Monitoring the selection process
- Interviewing shortlisted candidates
- Finalizing recruitment and reasonable accommodation and
- Integration into new working environment

Defining the required competencies and knowledge for the post

When recruiting a new employee with a disability, the first step is to define the job, which is to define the skills and knowledge expected of the candidate to complete the job. Most companies already have determined this information through the systematization of jobs. If a person with a disability fits the job description and is hired on the basis of an existing job vacancy, a list of knowledge and skills already should be at hand.

The following questions need answering before creating a job:

- What tasks already exist and why are they being implemented?
- How are these tasks implemented and how often?
- How long does it take for employers to create and/or adjust these positions?
- What knowledge and skills does a person need to carry out this specific task?
- What skills and competencies does this task require?
- How necessary is it for this activity to be carried out?
- Who carries it out, does it have to be carried out by all employees or can only certain persons carry it out?
- How important is it to complete the task within a certain deadline and what happens if it is not completed?
- How are the results measured?

Once these questions have been answered and evaluated, then employers can move forward to define the essential job requirements, shape the job description according to the necessary skills and competencies, and define any non-essential requirements before advertising the vacancy. While such an explicit approach may seem somewhat didactic, the rights and access to work of persons with disabilities require strong action so that companies understand their obligations to comply with new legislation in Serbia by either hiring persons with disabilities or contributing to the national fund.

Advertising vacancies

Finding the right candidate is the ultimate measure of a successful recruitment process. For companies inexperienced with hiring persons with disabilities, targeted advertising is an important factor. For example, a few recruiters in Serbia (see annex) already have databases of curriculum vitae from unemployed persons with disabilities who are actively seeking work. Advertising vacancies through access-to-work non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations of persons with disabilities may also help to generate a sufficient number of applicants. Reaching out to local media can also boost a company's recruitment of persons with disabilities from among the general public.



The National Employment Service (NES) is the main public institution that provides support to facilitate the recruitment of persons with disabilities. Their database, i.e. register of unemployed persons, includes unemployed persons who voluntarily agreed to be registered with NES. As a national service, the NES also provides employers with access to various types of subsidies when employing persons with disabilities. The NES has its own website where employers can post vacancy announcements and clearly indicate whether the vacancy is open to persons with disabilities. Research shows that a large number of persons with disabilities use NES advertisements when seeking work.¹⁸

Infostud¹⁹ is another website where employers can place their vacancy announcements and where they can specify if the position is suitable for persons with disabilities. Infostud is among the most popular services for jobseekers with disabilities.

Many NGOs and associations of persons with disabilities actively support the recruitment of persons with disabilities. They usually are well informed about their stakeholders who are seeking jobs, they often organize training for their members and they are familiar with their skills and competences. Addressing such organizations is a practical step for employers, especially at the local level. Tapping into these organizations' local knowledge and experience with persons with disabilities is indispensable to employers starting an equal opportunity recruitment process. In addition, some persons with disabilities NGOs and associations provide

awareness-raising training for employers. Some NGOs also cooperate with employers by playing the role of an employment service. For example, the Youth with Disabilities Forum is extremely active in Serbia.

During an equal opportunity recruitment process, employers must assure that it is free of any form of discrimination. By emphasizing the skills and knowledge necessary for the position, a company can promote an accessible and stigma-free workplace. Some sample statements that capture a more inclusive company culture during interviews and at the workplace include:

- We give equal opportunity to everyone
- We appreciate diversity and encourage candidates with the same values to apply
- We encourage persons with disabilities to apply
- We assess applicants solely on their abilities, knowledge and skills
- We provide reasonable accommodation both during the recruitment process and on the job

Overtly stating that a company is an equal opportunity employer, encourages applications from persons with disabilities and opens the recruitment process to all. Skills and knowledge should be the priority in any advertisement, leaving room for candidates to indicate additional competences. For example, research shows that persons with disabilities frequently attend self-improvement courses for which they receive no formal certificates. If a skills and knowledge test is required during recruitment, and the results of that test are more important than a diploma in selecting a candidate, this must be highlighted.

Applicants' work experience may vary. Work experience may include volunteering, temporary jobs, public works, professional practice, unpaid work and even life experience. Emphasize if the company provides on-the-job training for candidates with no prior knowledge of the job. Also leave candidates the option to indicate their specific special needs and whether they require any reasonable accommodation of the working environment when submitting their application.

Monitoring the selection process

In the selection process, a candidate's application should be treated fairly, no matter its format. When assessing applications, consideration should be given to each application as to whether a job adaptation is possible so that a person with disabilities could work effectively. It should be assessed whether it is possible to move the workplace to another location, reassign tasks or have flexible working hours. The selection process should focus on how well the candidate meets the aforementioned skills and knowledge requirements, and it should never focus on the type of disability, which is discriminatory. Applicants should be selected according to how many of them meet the first criteria, then the second and the third.

Interviewing shortlisted candidates

When arranging interviews, candidates may be asked what their individual needs are. Questions about their type of disability are never raised, and only questions on any type of accommodation are appropriate.

Some examples of reasonable accommodation for access to work include:

- A space that is accessible for all
- Accessible parking and a ground floor interview room
- Providing interpreters for persons who needs them
- Special accommodations specified by candidates invited to interview
- Tests adapted to a format for the visually impaired

When interviewing, make sure that the candidate is:

- Aware that they can ask for reasonable accommodation, if needed
- Provided reasonable accommodation unless that would cost an undue burden
- Interviewed in a direct conversation, regardless of the presence of an interpreter
- Asked to repeat a response if the interviewer does not understand
- Respected in terms of their personal space; avoid questions about the actual disability of the interviewee

Make sure personal prejudices and opinions are not affected by the interview. Persons with disabilities are masters at developing innovative ways to solve problems and perform tasks and bring new skill sets and knowledge to the workplace. Each candidate must be provided with a fair opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and capabilities. Applicants who have been selected can visit the workplace with the employer and indicate if any further accommodation is required according to their needs.

Finalizing recruitment and reasonable accommodation

When a person with disabilities is hired and where no previously existing vacancies have defined that position, a company may need to create a suitable workspace and re-evaluate the tasks of its employees. For instance, individual employees often take on jobs not exactly in their job descriptions, i.e. employees perform additional tasks that are above or below their qualifications. A subsequent redistribution of tasks may result in a new job.

Reasonable accommodation of the workspace can range from parking places, ramp access to company premises to changes in the actual workspace. In addition to a customized desk and seat, dedicated computer equipment or software may be required. Office furniture and its accessibility, height and layout should be adjusted to the needs of persons with disabilities. Toilet accessibility is also paramount in the provision of a safe working environment for persons with disabilities.

Part-time work, job shares, flexible hours, working from home and more frequent breaks should be made available to persons with disabilities in the workplace as they begin and adapt to new workspace as well as work duties. Employers should keep in mind that all employees are given the opportunity to progress and develop. Once they see that reasonable accommodations have been made to the workplace, employees will perform at their maximum and make a valuable contribution to a company's inclusive culture and results in the marketplace.

The project report highlights:

Other examples such as ILO Policy brief, “Making apprenticeships and workplace learning inclusive of persons with disabilities” can be found online.²⁰





VOICES FROM INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS



“I COULDN'T WAIT TO GET STARTED”

–Ljiljana from Novitas Consult in Šabac

Company: **Novitas Consult d.o.o**

Total number of employees: **18**

Percentage of employees with disabilities: **82% (ca. 15)**

Sector: **Packaging and distribution**

Location: **Šabac**

Contact: **<http://www.novitas.co.rs/>**

Ljiljana wakes up two hours earlier every morning to exercise and prepare for her shift in a packing plant in Šabac, a small city in Western Serbia with a population of 50,000. She has worked for Novitas Consult, a company providing employment to persons with disabilities, for three years. Thanks to the steady stream of work at Novitas, Ljiljana has applied for a mortgage so she can buy an apartment and live independently.

Ljiljana appreciates her job every day and her smile lights up the floor. She has worked for Novitas Consult since graduation from the agricultural high school in Šabac three years ago. “I was quite persistent,” she says, “My family helped me to approach the National Employment Service in Šabac and encouraged me to knock more than once on Novitas’s door.”

After two months of wondering, she got a call: Novitas wanted to hire her.

Ljiljana recalls that during her job interview, Marija, the co-owner, had expressed “time and patience.”

“That’s important,” she adds, “that an employer has time and patience to understand.” Marija says of their first meeting, “Ljiljana has a strong energy and combativeness that was apparent when we first met. Once the conditions for her employment were met, she was hired. We could see her persistence, energy and willpower.”

After landing the job, Ljiljana was assigned to Danica, her mentor at the firm, along with the support of the company psychologist. Thanks to their help – and the help of a family of colleagues—Ljiljana did not experience any problems adjusting to the job.

Ljiljana walks everywhere, and she does not want help. Since establishing herself at Novitas, Ljiljana has asked for the

company's financial support for a mortgage. She wants to live in an apartment on her own and be independent. Three years into her job, Ljiljana says she's helping new employees because of "what it meant to her when she was new."

Danica confirms that working together helps them to achieve even bigger goals as a team. Some employees are collecting bottle caps to buy a wheelchair for a colleague receiving treatment in Italy. They also list other team-building activities, such as charity and New Year gatherings with families, suppliers, partners and friends. Everyone calls one another by their nicknames. Marija, Danica and Ljiljana point out that working with persons with disabilities is highly rewarding.

The firm made another step forward when it decided to raise awareness about the contribution of its employees with disabilities to its success: Novitas registered "Fair Product" as a brand and trademark. By purchasing products marked with the Fair Product logo, consumers can support the inclusion of persons with disabilities as equal citizens in work, life and society.

Novitas Consult was founded in 2013. It began by employing five persons with disabilities. The company overcame a difficult start to secure all the permits required to register officially as a social enterprise that employs persons with disabilities, but now six years later

Marija underlines how few enterprises are aware of the benefits of collaborating with enterprises established for the professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities. So far, corporate social responsibility programmes in Belgrade have yet to catch up with Novitas's visibility in the mainstream media and on social media platforms.

“
We're very aware of how fortunate we are.
Nothing in my life is that difficult compared to
their challenges.

—*Marija, co-owner*

After work, Ljiljana takes a walk. At meetings of the Association of Persons with Muscular Dystrophy and Cerebral Palsy, she seeks to empower others and share her positive experiences. Ljiljana recently returned from her holidays and commented, "I couldn't wait to get started." If Ljiljana feared she might be unable to adjust to her new workplace, by now she feels "valuable and self-confident, like I'm becoming independent and my own person."

the company has 18 employees, 15 of whom have disabilities. Novitas' employs only persons with disabilities who are designated "hard-to-employ". The company specializes in packaging and has received multiple awards for its work.



Be persistent. Get as much information as possible in the NES and visit enterprises. Be proactive and create opportunities. Don't just read job descriptions online. Employers need to have patience, time and, above all, trust.

—Ljiljana's message for persons with disabilities



“IN THE END THE ***BEST CANDIDATE*** WON”

—Ivana from Delta Holding in Belgrade

Company: **Delta Holding**

Total number of employees: **4,500**

Percentage of employees with disabilities: **1.3% (ca. 60)**

Sector: **Agribusiness, automobiles, food processing, real estate development, wholesale distribution**

Location: **Belgrade**

Contact: **<https://www.deltaholding.rs/>**

Ivana was tired of working from home, missed the company of others and applied to join Delta Holdings, a large Serbian enterprise with its headquarters in Belgrade. Once hired, she quickly adjusted and never looked back, going on to earn an MBA and become a vital member of her team at a company that has led the way with its inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

Ivana arrived at Delta Holding 12 years ago after interviewing for a position advertised online. She recalls, “I was working at home for a year and felt too isolated, missed the human interaction of the workplace and wanted to collaborate with people.”

When she applied, Ivana had some previous work experience and a diploma from a local business school, but what was crucial were her “motivation and desire to work.” Ivana is one of 60 persons with disabilities working at Delta, a large firm

with over 4,500 employees and operations in several business sectors.

Ivana is cheerful and confident in her role at her workplace where she’s in charge of administration. “I didn’t know what I was supposed to do at first, but my colleagues always helped me understand the work processes and answered my questions. I was afraid if I would be accepted.” She was surprised by how few modifications were required to her work space and how easily she fit in. “I had been invited to work—a new challenge for me. The desire to improve. Motivation.”

Ivana travels to and from work by organized public transport for disabled persons, and also attends workouts three times a week. She is active attending trainings organized by the company. She says, “Everyone in the company can improve and advance. It’s up to you.” Encouraged by the company’s attitude toward education and professional skills, Ivana

completed an online MBA. “I think there are no boundaries; everything can be done when it’s wanted. It’s only necessary to be persistent and want it—sometimes you have to be direct and ask for it. That applies to everyone.”

Delta’s philosophy has been to lead the pack when hiring persons with disabilities. Katarina Vidanović, the firm’s legal advisor for labour rights, explains that the company employs persons with disabilities who fill many different roles – from technicians and software developers to managers. “The important thing for employers is to be flexible about the needs of employees with disabilities, in terms of flexible working hours, working from home and part-time working,” Katarina explains. She cites the example of a female software developer who can work from home some days, a win-win situation. Katarina underlines that “Ivana is a reliable, wonderful team member who makes our day thanks to her good mood and positive outlook.”

Delta has instituted internal policies to ensure its recruiting and working practices conform to Serbia’s Labour Code and other legislation covering the rights of persons with disabilities. Since 2008, Delta invited the Creative Educational Centre and the Youth with Disabilities Forum to design a systematic programme for persons with disabilities at Delta, including education of its workforce and reasonable accommodation of the workspace. Simultaneously, the Human Resources department was trained about what steps were needed to integrate persons with disabilities into the company’s processes, producing a manual to educate all Delta employees about its policies regarding persons with disabilities.

Delta has established a charity to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities, including a day-care in Belgrade and a rehabilitation centre in Kragujevac in addition to



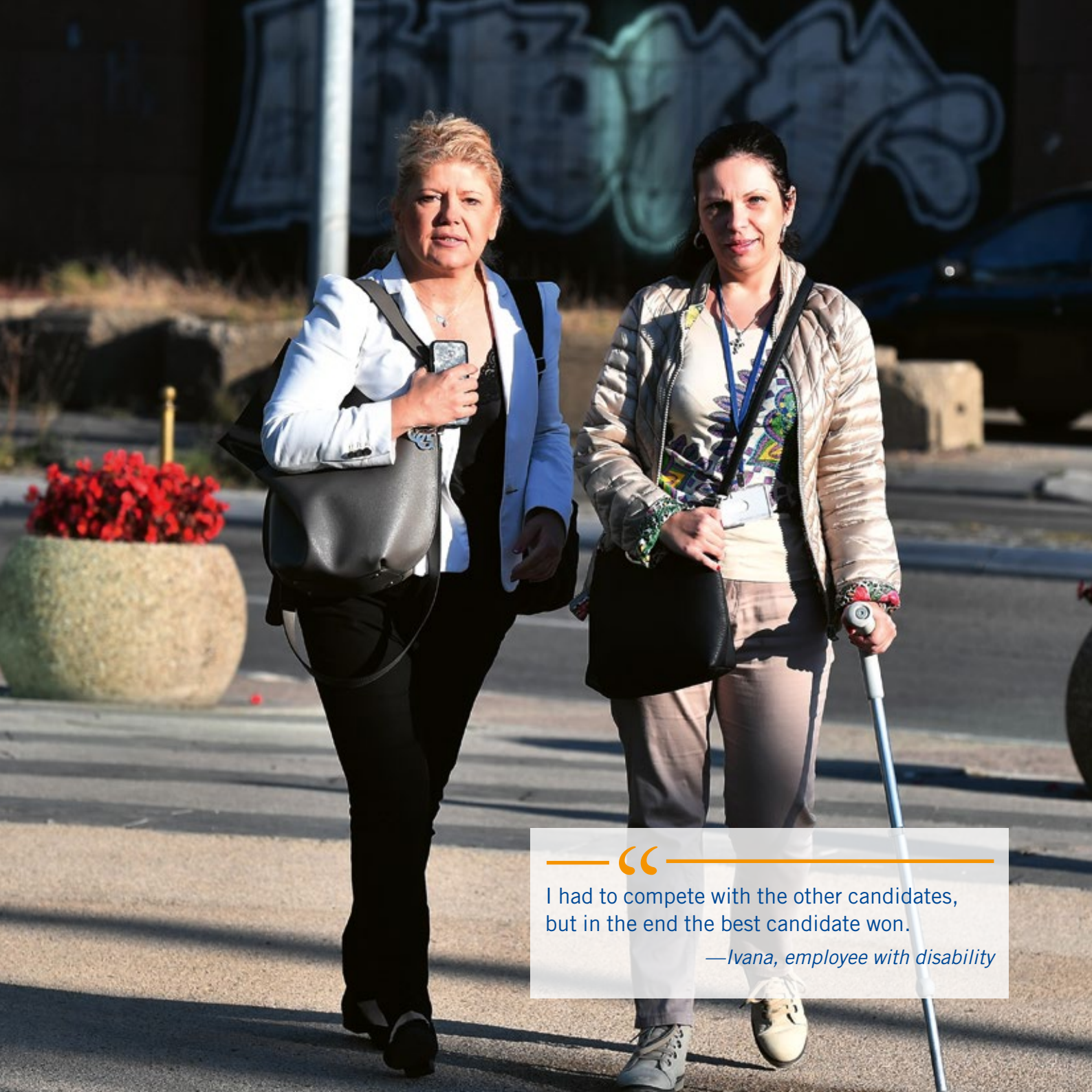
It means a lot to them when they see that an employer is willing to meet their needs and that they understand them.

—Katarina, company legal advisor

seeding projects that support social entrepreneurship across Serbia. Its efforts to support an inclusive workforce have been recognized with membership in International Labour Organization’s Global Business and Disability Network. Since 2012, Delta has received several national business awards for its work with persons with disabilities.

Katarina believes employers should “give a chance to persons with disabilities as equal employees. They can achieve a lot,” especially if they are “active and involved.” Katarina emphasizes that “the good will of the employer is most important.”

Ivana emphasizes that “hope, desire, will and persistence are the keys to success; seek and it will be given to you; you should not wait for something to happen on its own.” Self-initiative is as essential as the desire to acquire new knowledge. And work brings “material security, self-reliance and independence.” Ivana offers this advice to potential employers: “Do not judge a person by their appearance but by what they can offer you as an employee and as a human being. There is always a desire and will, it just needs to be recognized.”



— “

I had to compete with the other candidates,
but in the end the best candidate won.

—Ivana, employee with disability

A woman with dark hair, wearing a yellow apron over an orange shirt, stands in a sewing workshop. She is looking directly at the camera. In the background, there are shelves with boxes, a clock, and a first aid kit. To her right, there is a sewing machine with a lamp and spools of thread. A semi-transparent orange rectangle is in the upper right corner.

“THE *WILL TO WORK* AND LEARN IS
NUMBER ONE”

—Zorica from Prva Linija D.O.O in Zrenjanin

Company: **Prva Linija d.o.o**

Total number of employees: **108**

Percentage of employees with disabilities: **9.2% (ca. 10)**

Sector: **Manufacturing**

Location: **Zrenjanin**

Contact: **Dr Z. Kamenkovića 46, Zrenjanin**

Zorica has worked at Prva Linija for a decade. Hired when she was over 40, she has grown from a shy trainee to department head. The company played an important role in registering her disability with the state administration, something she thought impossible when working in Serbia's shadow economy.

"I learned from a friend that Prva Linija employees were registered officially and that the company paid its workers regularly. I had graduated from a vocational school and had worked for 18 years before being made redundant. I turned to the black market to make ends meet," Zorica says.

When she applied the company had no policy regarding the selection of persons with disabilities. The management simply believed that disability had little bearing on the job. "Before the interview I worried because I knew nothing about manufacturing shoes or the machines involved. And I was over 40." She smiles as she remembers trying to sew her first shoe.

Later, the director Uroš asked, "Why not stay if you like the job?"

Uroš was to become her mentor, while her new colleagues showed her the ropes. Everyone learns on the job with hands on training at Prva Linija. She says, "I started doing simple tasks before doing more demanding ones." Zorica did not have any disability status at first. Only when the owner Maja encouraged her to visit the health commission, with the company covering the costs, did Zorica apply for official recognition of her disability status. Shortly thereafter she was promoted in recognition of her conscientious work at the company where she has made many friends.

By now, Prva Linija recognizes that candidates should indicate their status so the company can find them the right roles. Zorica is one of 10 employees with disabilities at this company with 108 staff on its payroll.

Maja finds persons with disabilities to be grateful and disciplined. “They love to learn and to master a new set of skills,” she says, “And they like to stay put.” She adds, “Our attitude always has been that my partner and I can lead from the top by treating and accepting everyone equally and fostering that attitude across the company. Any person can find the right job for which they have an affinity and where they can reach their full potential. We, as managers, have the task to figure out at which workplace.”



Everyone helped me and now it's my turn.
I received all the support you could imagine
from the company, and I feel like the wind, a
tailwind, is always in my sails.

—Zorica, employee with disability

Prva Linija actively tailors the work environment to bring the best out of its teams, and small adjustments have led to employees taking these opportunities to do what they can, the best they can. “The will to work and learn is number one for us. The faith and trust we put in our employees has been returned multiple times. We like to give them space to develop and to loosen up. Mistakes are a normal part of the job and are opportunities to learn,” she says.

However, when the company introduced departmental performance indicators, some murmurs of discontent were heard from those who thought the company should focus strictly on individuals. Maja deftly pushed the criticism aside: “It’s not always a good day for everyone,” she says.

Maja advises employers to set aside their prejudices. “Persons with disabilities are equal with everyone else and no different from other workers.”

“Don’t give up,” Zorica advises. “You’ll be given a chance somewhere. Even if you have no experience, you will unearth a hidden talent.”



Prva Linija never has emphasized that it employs a significant number of persons with disabilities. They consider that everyone who is able to work is equal. The company received the Most Persons with Disabilities Employees Award from the National Employment Service in 2018.



“

Don't give up. You'll be given a chance somewhere. Even if you have no experience, you will unearth a hidden talent.

—Zorica, employee with disability

A man with a shaved head and a dark blue polo shirt stands with his arms crossed in a garage. Behind him, a silver car is elevated on a blue hydraulic lift. The underside of the car is visible, showing the chassis and wheels. The word "PATRIOT" is embossed on the rear of the car's body. The garage background is filled with various tools and equipment.

PATRIOT

“I WAS GIVEN A *RAISE AND PROMOTED*”

Trim 
—Momčilo from Trim D.O.O in Jagodina

Company: **Trim d.o.o**

Total number of employees: **48**

Percentage of employees with disabilities: **2.1% (ca. 1)**

Sector: **Manufacturing**

Location: **Jagodina**

Contact: **<http://trim.internetsajtovi.com/>**

Momčilo has worked at Trim for the last seven years. He has primary education and a Serbian driver's licence in categories B, C and E. Momčilo previously worked as a heavy machine operator in a quarry for 13 years before redundancy. The NES placed Momčilo at Trim, and his presence has become an essential part of the company's work flow.

"I attended some courses organized by the NES before joining Trim," Momčilo says, "I also faced some issues at home when I was unemployed." NES advisers listened to his case, and he soon was recommended to Trim. "I prepared for the interview, and it seemed like a good fit," he says.

Momčilo supervises the company's automobile fleet, makes small repairs around the offices, and sometimes makes shorter business trips. A colleague who previously held the same position trained him about his tasks and responsibilities.

Radoš, Trim's director, says, "Momčilo turned out to be the right person for us, with the knowledge and skills needed for the job we had in mind. His job isn't difficult, but it's demanding, a real responsibility, and his presence is necessary every day. We usually ask him if he feels well to do the job, and if not, he can work out of office. We're cautious not to overload him."



It's vital that you find a company where you won't be harassed. Find a company like mine and you'll be really happy.

—*Momčilo, employee with disability*

Momčilo takes medication several times a day, together with a mandatory pre-treatment meal. Everybody understands his needs. "They're fair and reasonable," he says. "The company offered that I have computer literacy and study first aid, and I

was given a raise and promoted.” Momčilo praises the benefits that are available, including paid sick leave above the national average, child-care allowances, eight-hour shifts and paid overtime. The company also arranges social events outside of work like a company party for employees and their families at the New Year.



In relation to his (Momčilo’s) level of working experience, he is now overqualified for his job.

—Radoš, company director

He adds, “I also like the level of hygiene within the offices, and that I do not feel overwhelmed by stress.”

“So far persons with disabilities have not applied for vacancies,” says Radoš, “But this would not mean exclusion if the person meets the job requirements according to their knowledge, skills and abilities.”

“The design of our new premises can be changed to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. Even if the stairs are narrow and there is no space for an elevator, the ground floor offices are accessible without installing a ramp,” says Radoš. He emphasizes, “Hiring a person with disabilities is not a minus but brings only benefits to a company.”

Momčilo advises persons with disabilities to exercise their discretion when choosing an employer, while employers should take into consideration how much persons with

disabilities actually can achieve. By hiring persons with disabilities, a company helps their employees’ families, and in return they get workers who benefit the company many times over.



Trim strives to be active making donations to help local children with special needs as well as local organizations and schools. They donate globally to UNICEF.



“

I prepared for the interview, and it seemed like a good fit.

—Momčilo, employee with disability

FINAL MESSAGE—ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE

Substantial global evidence supports the claim that companies that place employees at the centre of their strategies have, in the long run, greater monetary returns compared to their competitors. To achieve that, employers today must balance the need to understand the motives, expectations and demands of their employees with insights on how to evaluate and predict employee behaviour and how to manage the factors that affect employee involvement in and engagement with their work. Understanding employee/employer dynamics has become an essential component to a company's progress in an increasingly competitive and challenging business environment.

The importance of being responsible to the community is another measure of a company's success. Maximizing the improvement of business results requires the fulfilment of four interdependent conditions: engaged employees, loyal customers, a strong brand and a strong reputation.

The central role of human capital is apparent in the interviews with employees with disabilities and their employers that vary in size, region and sector. According to the participants, persons with disabilities meet or exceed performance targets, they are active and responsible, and they bring good value for the company, both internally and externally. Their best qualities rise to the surface when their integration into work is selfless and professional, assisted by both employer and colleagues.



The common message expressed by all participants is that the success of one employee reflects on the success of the team, and consequently on society at large. An ideal synergy of qualities of all participants in the business chain (employer, owner, employee, employee with disability) contributes to the quality of daily life. The chance of success is far greater when unreserved integration aligns with both the internal work environment and the external environment of family, friends and community.

ANNEX: EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES SPECIALIZED IN RECRUITING DISABLED PERSONS

Name	Town	Street	Contact	Web Site
INFOSTUD 3	Subotica	Vladimira Nazora 7	024 41 55 628 poslovi@infostud.com	https://www.infostud.com
Centre for Development of Inclusive Society	Belgrade	Zahumska 23a	063 894 99 77 office@crid.org.rs	http://www.crid.org.rs/
Centre for Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities Serbia	Belgrade	Milenka Vesnića 3	011 367-53-17 011 367-53-18 office@cilsrbija.org	http://www.osi-press.com/
Dekra zapošljavanje	Belgrade	Bulevar Zorana Đinđića 64A	011 2120454 office@dekra.rs	https://www.dekra.rs
Youth with Disabilities Forum	Belgrade	Terazije 23	011 32 20 632 office@fmi.rs	http://zaposljavanje.fmi.rs/
HR Bulevar	Belgrade	Kneginje Zorke 5	011 630-6580 office@hrbulevar.rs	https://www.ustupanje-radnika.com/
Klik do posla	Smederevska Palanka	Prvi Srpski Ustanak 190	kontakt@klikdoposla.com	https://www.klikdoposla.com/
Mirna Kuća	Belgrade	Admirala Geparta 8	011 36 19 898 mirnakuca@sezampro.rs	http://www.mirnakuca.com/
National Employment Service	National towns	Branch offices	Branch offices	https://www.nsz.gov.rs
New City Jobs	Belgrade	Tiršova 5	011 347016 info@newcityjobs.rs	https://newcityjobs.rs/

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia* (hereafter: Official Gazette), No. 113/17 and 95/18.
- 2 *Official Gazette*, No. 95/2018, Articles 12, 18, 22, 28, 91 and 100 of the Labour Law
- 3 *Official Gazette*, No. 36/2009 and 32/2013, Article 24 of the Law on professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities.
- 4 A legal entity carries out activities in order to make a profit, and the status of a legal entity is acquired upon registration in accordance with a law governing the registration of economic entities.
- 5 According to the provisions of Article 83 of the Law on companies (Official Gazette, No. 125/04), an entrepreneur is defined as a business-oriented natural person who is registered with the register of companies and performs business activities in order to make a profit.
- 6 *Official Gazette*, No. 36/2009 and 32/2013, Article 26 of the Law on professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities.
- 7 An enterprise for professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities is a legal entity, the function of which is regulated by the Law on professional rehabilitation (Official Gazette, No. 36/2009 and 32/2013, Articles 35–42). Such enterprises specialize in creating new jobs and employing persons with disabilities, and, in accordance with the law, at least 50 percent of their permanently employed staff must be persons with disabilities, out of which at least 10 percent must be persons with disabilities who can be employed only under special conditions (necessary work place adaptation, defined and prescribed by Articles 22–23 of the Law on professional rehabilitation).
- 8 *Official Gazette*, No. 36/2009 and 32/2013, Article 27 of the Law on professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities.
- 9 *Official Gazette*, No. 22/09, Law on the prohibition of discrimination, Article 16.
- 10 *Official Gazette*, No. 33/06 and 13/16, Law on prevention of discrimination against persons with disabilities, Articles 21 to 26.
- 11 *Official Gazette*, No. 36/09 and 32/13, Law on professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, Article 31.
- 12 *Official Gazette*, No. 95/18 and 4/19, Law on compulsory social security contribution, Article 45b.
- 13 2019 National Employment Action Plan, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans' and Social Affairs, Belgrade, 2019. http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/nacionalni_akcioni_plan_zaposljavanja_2019.pdf
- 14 The category of “hard-to-employ persons” or long-term unemployed is defined by the Law on employment and unemployment insurance (Official Gazette, No. 36/2009, 88/2010, 38/2015, 113/2017 i 113/2017), in Article 31 as “unemployed person who due to health condition, insufficient or inappropriate education, social demographic characteristics, regional or professional mismatch between offer and demand in labour market, or other objective circumstances has a harder time finding a job”. Subsidies for job creation and employment of persons in this category are intended to stimulate a broader and more inclusive labour market.
- 15 Improving the employability of long-term unemployed persons with disabilities, Youth with Disabilities Forum, Belgrade, 2019. <http://fmi.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Forum-brosura-web.pdf>
- 16 Improving the employability of long-term unemployed persons with disabilities, Youth with Disabilities Forum, Belgrade, 2019, p. 71, 77, 99–100. <http://fmi.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Forum-brosura-web.pdf>
- 17 For more on the case for business inclusive of persons with disabilities, see “Guide for business on the rights of persons with disabilities - How business can respect and support the rights of persons with disabilities and benefit from inclusion”, UN Global Compact and the ILO, 2017. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/disability-and-work/WCMS_633424/lang-en/index.htm
- 18 In Serbia, registering with the NES Database of unemployed persons is voluntary, not obligatory.
- 19 Private job search/vacancies platform.
- 20 Making apprenticeships and workplace learning inclusive of persons with disabilities, ILO Policy brief, 2018. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/disability-and-work/WCMS_633257/lang-en/index.htm

