

# Employing people with disabilities is part of a meaningful CSR strategy

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**Currently, more than 150,000 thousand people in Slovakia with a disability are awaiting a job opportunity. In many instances, their disability can automatically exclude them from the job market. A meaningful Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy with disability management knowledge can bring important benefits to companies and society as a whole.**

## From a voluntary approach to highly responsible CSR strategies

The understanding of CSR by businesses has changed in recent years to a more modern version, where CSR refers to the responsibility of enterprises to make positive impacts on society. The same change follows the UNHCR Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, where the importance of acknowledging that enterprises that embrace CSR have a huge impact on the economic and environmental situation and on society as a whole including human rights is stressed.

The evolving definitions reflect the changing needs of modern societies and responsibilities of corporate enterprises. Enterprises have a huge impact on the rights and wellbeing of people in society. Enterprises can modernize their understanding of CSR to enhance not only their profits, but also actively engage in helping the community in which they live.

## In Slovakia eight out of ten PwD are not actively employed

People with a disability (PwD) comprise 15% of the world's population, the biggest minority in the world. The latest data for Slovakia shows that PwD make up 8.6% (450 thousand people) of the working age population. 80% of them remain economically inactive, which puts them at much higher risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Among those who are working, many are underemployed, paid below the minimum wage, are not able to fully apply their abilities, are on

temporary contracts and have limited career prospects.

PwD are not a homogeneous group. They may have a physical disability, a sensory, intellectual or mental disability. Their disability may have little impact on their ability to work and take part in society, or it may have a major impact, requiring considerable support and assistance. Society often has preconceived ideas regarding PwD. Many of these are stereotypes and prejudices about their ability to work. The latest data from studies shows that PwD are more likely to be loyal to employers, take less time off due to illness and are more likely to act ethically.

## Knowledge on how to manage employment of PwD is lacking.

Legal frameworks in Slovakia are not as supportive as they should be. The purpose of the Employment Services Act should be to motivate employers to employ PwD. The Act obliges organizations with more than 20 employees to employ PwD, or pay a financial penalty. Enterprises often prefer to pay the annual financial obligation, rather than employ PwD. Unfortunately enterprises which go down this pathway are missing out on the benefits of employing PwD.

One of the main reasons businesses do not employ PwD is the lack of expertise on disability and knowledge on how to manage disability from an employment perspective. Enterprises don't know how to support employees with a disability, or how to change

the culture of their organization to be more inclusive. Those responsible for the coordination of equal opportunities should receive training in disability management, or have access to qualified personnel. There are numerous organizations, mainly non-profits, who can provide this knowledge and assistance.



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## A meaningful CSR strategy includes employment of PwD at all levels.

Enterprises wanting to implement a meaningful CSR strategy should improve employment prospects for PwD, promote equal opportunities in the workplace and offer a safe, accessible and healthy workplace. As the International Labour Organization has stated, CSR should be part of employment policy and human resources development strategy at all companies. This policy should be reflected in

recruitment procedures and job advertisements. In addition, an inclusive strategy which manages disability issues is not only about CSR, or just the responsibility of the HR department, it should also be brought to the attention of all employees, in a language which can be easily understood. This is the only way to ensure PwD are treated equally with non-disabled workers.

## Employing PwD is rewarding for enterprises.

Many research projects across EU member states have confirmed that enterprises who are well-informed and capable of employing PwD positively, often receive many benefits over their competitors, such as:

- Lower absenteeism, lower incidence of workplace injuries and lower employee turnover.
- Employees in inclusive workplaces are more likely to be engaged, motivated and productive.
- Improved staff morale resulting in greater teamwork, strong workplace culture and cohesiveness.
- Access to an untapped hidden talent pool.
- Existing staff gain confidence to disclose a disability.
- Improving goods and services, to make them more disability-friendly.
- Opening up a potential new market for sales of goods and services.
- Potential increase of customer base.
- Stronger customer and stakeholders relationships.
- Improved reputation by improving living standards.
- Reduced financial state penalties

As the great Stephen Hawking said: "Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change" and that's all you need for a meaningful and inclusive CSR strategy.